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Beforehand

[image]

A few things before the story begins. Please bear with me.

First of all, all author notes (aka. A/Ns) are signed "-Shadowstorm". This is because Shadowstorm was my username when I wrote this book. Whether it is now, I don't know.

I will try to respond to your comments as soon as I can, and I read and appreciate *all* of them. I am happy to be criticized in comments, and if you have tips, you can write those, too. I also love the basic comments- praise, questions, readers just following the story, and such.

This story takes place about thirty cat-lives after the sixth series. I tried to make this as similar as possible to the real Warriors books.

PLEASE DO NOT advertise your books in one of these comments or my profile! I love to have tips, constructive criticism, questions and almost all kinds of comments, but it's very annoying when people advertise their books on this.

Thanks for choosing to read this, and I hope you enjoy!

-Shadowstorm

Allegiances:

[image]

I tried not to make too many characters, so it's different from the actual books. But here they are:

ShadowClan:

Leader: Fernstar- Grey she-cat with fern-green eyes that turn teal the further from the pupil

Deputy: Frogscar- White tom with grey paws and tail

Medicine Cat: Tallmeadow- Black she-cat with grey stripe

Warriors:

Thinfur- Thin-furred black tom with yellow eyes

Treepool- Mottled brown tom with amber eyes

Grassfang- White tom with green eyes and a lean muzzle

Queens:

Badgerleap- Bright ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Yowltail- Sandy yellow, lean she-cat with amber eyes

ThunderClan:

Leader: Strikestar- Ginger tom with dark amber eyes

Deputy: Boltfur- Ginger she-cat with pale blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Snarlfang- Dark grey tom with unfocused amber eyes

Warriors:

Sparktail- Mottled ginger she-cat with white stripes around tail

Mousesong- Light grey tom with amber eyes

Voleecho- Dark grey tom with amber eyes

Heatpelt- Red-brown tabby she-cat with green eyes

Sapnose- Brown tom with copper eyes and torn tail

Hardclaw- Black tom with icy blue eyes

Thorntail- Spiky-furred white tom with sharp green eyes

Apprentices:

Stonepaw- Grey tom with blue eyes

Spotpaw- Yellow tom with amber eyes

Bushpaw- Thick-furred grey tom with hooked claws and shiny amber eyes

Slatepaw- Dappled grey and white she-cat

Queens:

Flaketail- Thick-furred brown she-cat

Glancetail- Dark ginger she-cat with odd blinking habit

WindClan:

Leader: Quickstar- Light grey tom with blue eyes

Deputy: Ravenfur- Skinny black she-cat with short fur and narrow muzzle

Medicine Cat: Beechleap- Mottled brown tom

Warriors:

Fangleap- Grey tom with half-blind eye

Stripeflight- Striped grey tabby tom

Comfreytail- White she-cat

Amberflight- Amber she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentices:

Speedpaw- Grey tabby she-cat with long tail and blue eyes

Dewpaw- Pale yellow tom

Queens:

Litheleg- Yellow she-cat

RiverClan:

Leader: Coralstar- Pinkish she-cat with yellow eyes

Deputy: Fishnose- White and grey tom with blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Finspot- Grey tom with single black spot

Warriors:

Mosstail- Moss-green eyed silver-grey tom

Deeppool- Tabby she-cat with deep blue eyes like pools

Troutfin- Weed-green-eyed silver-grey she-cat

Narrowfang- Thick-furred grey tom

Stemstorm- Mottled silver tom

Apprentices:

Lakepaw-Sky-blue eyed grey she-cat

Streampaw- Sky-blue eyed black she-cat

Slitherpaw- Smooth-furred silver she-cat

Shortpaw- Sleek ginger tom

Arrowpaw- Dark-blue eyed grey tom

Queens:

Shellstripe- Dappled white she-cat

SkyClan:

Leader: Rainstar- Grey tom

Deputy: Stonefall- Green-eyed tabby she-cat

Medicine Cat: Cloudstorm- Beautiful dappled white she-cat with lilac eyes

Warriors:

Sparrownose- Ginger-and-white tom with amber eyes and scarred muzzle

Grassleap- Tabby tom with green eyes

Tenderleaf- Tortoiseshell she-cat

Apprentices:

Soilpaw- Brown tom

Longpaw- Black she-cat

Molepaw- Dark grey tabby she-cat

Featherpaw- Mottled grey tom

Queens:

Shardstorm- Grey she-cat

Maps

Cat View:

Twoleg View:

Prologue

[image]

All was not well in ShadowClan. Although things seemed it, ShadowClan was short of Clanmates and Twolegs had ravaged their territories, scaring most prey away, and loyalties were being threatened. A gray she-cat made her way onto the territory, searching for someone. "Thinfur? Thinfur? Please, Thinfur, I know you're there!"

"Rabbitear," a voice breathed. A short black cat stepped out of the shadows, masked in the scent of leaves. "You came."

"Of course, my love," the she-cat replied, purring warmly. They touched noses affectionately. "But it will get harder." Her dark grey face seemed to darken.

"What do you mean?"

"My leader almost caught me. What will happen when somebody *does*?"

"I will leave ShadowClan and join you," Thinfur declared. "That is how far my love for you goes." A cricket chirped in the background, the half moon rising.

"Thinfur. I'm expecting kits. *Your* kits." Rabbitear revealed. *Please, StarClan, don't punish us. We love each other so, so much. We didn't mean for this to happen. It just did.*

"That's wonderful!" Thinfur exclaimed. "Why so worried?" Rabbitear hesitated, fixing her gaze on her love's meaningful yellow eyes.

"What will happen to them?" she asked. "They'll be half-clan, Thinfur. What if we've ruined their lives forever?"

"Nonsense." Thinfur twined his tail with hers, breathing softly. "This will be their future. I can already sense that they'll be important."

"But what does that matter, if they can only have one of their kin?"

"*They*?" Thinfur questioned. His eyes darted to a leaf, his pelt bristling. "Someone's coming. We have to be quick."

"I can feel them. There's two, two perfect kits. But I'm scared. What will become of them?"

"So I'll join your Clan," Thinfur looked away slightly.

"But you don't want to. Your kin is there."

"My kin is dying," Thinfur mewed. "They are all dying. All of ShadowClan. Slowly, but they're dying. If these kits are born elsewhere, they might be happy, but not in ShadowClan." They both swiveled their heads towards the pines, hearing a branch snap. "Come here in one sunset," Thinfur pleaded. "Please." Rabbitear nodded and darted off like the wind.

...

Thinfur glanced around as he silently padded through the camp, towards a marsh in their territory. He stifled a cough, smelling monsters, and dashed into the dark woods. He blinked as he arrived. "Rabbitear?" Silence greeted him, and he froze. Rabbitear was always earlier than him. "Rabbitear, please, come," he mewed. Suddenly, a flash of grey fur bashed into his side and he stumbled, unsheathing his claws. His ears perked up as his eyes locked with a blue gaze.

"You should've seen your *face*," Rabbitear snorted. "So we know what we're doing?"

"I can't," Thinfur whispered. "I can't leave you. It will break my heart." Rabbitear nuzzled him and whispered, "We have to do this. It's our only choice."

"I can't!," Thinfur yowled, forgetting to be quiet. "I can't live without you, Rabbitear! I can't help feeling like this, but you're part of me!"

"Shh," Rabbitear mewed. "They'll hear. I know this is hard." He sighed and let his spiked fur lie flat. *But how will I* survive *without*

you? he thought to himself. She licked his forehead and he let his tail brush her side lovingly.

"If only I could go with you," he murmured, staring into her eyes. "Then all would be fine."

"They need kin," his loved one murmured. "And I can't stay in WindClan. I need to go, or else I could ruin lives."

"But it's not your fault. If you stay, they'll hate you, and you would surely die. Nobody would forgive you for falling in love with me, especially not WindClan." He paused, thinking carefully about his next words, and added, "I only killed a WindClan cat because Fernstar is on her last life. The others think she can still die, but she *can't*. It was her or him, and ShadowClan is already falling apart."

"Don't worry," Rabbitear mewed. "I swear on Starclan that I will always love you, Thinfur. I swear it. Nothing will ever break our bond, not even if I was made into a kittypet." The two cats stared into one another's eyes, purring. *I swear it too,* Thinfur thought. *I swear it. Nothing will break our bonds. I would take on StarClan for you.*

Neither cat noticed as a dark grey she-cat silently stalked away, her beautiful green eyes glistening with sorrow.

I know- the prolgue contained a *lot* of fluff... I'm going crazy that FOUR people read the prologue already; I know it isn't a lot, but it's my first fanfic! Please comment and say if you liked it. Thanks!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter One

[image]

Darkkit nosed the mouse hungrily, opening her jaws to bite down on it. Orangekit snarled at her, flashing the younger kit a glare with her odd, bright orange eyes. Couldn't she just have amber eyes? Her orange ones made her seem intimidating. Darkkit backed away. "It's *mine*," Orangekit spat.

"No, it's for *all* of us," Darkkit replied shakily. "ShadowClan is short on prey and you *know* it. All of us have to share it."

"Yeah," Shadekit mewled. "We need to eat too." Orangekit batted the little tom's ear with an unsheathed paw, hissing.

"I'm going to be the leader of ShadowClan, so *I* need the fresh-kill. Right, Badgerleap?" Orangekit's mother nodded, not really listening. She was growing older each moonhigh, and her hearing was sharp, but she had a lot on her mind. "*And*, I have *ShadowClan* kin. Who knows where you're from." Orangekit sighed importantly.

"No fair!" Darkkit snapped. "Just beca-"

"Leave it, Darkkit," Shadekit grumbled, narrowing his dark blue eyes in annoyance. His fur bristled"It's not like Orangekit cares. We can't control who our kin is. But at least we have Thinfur. So if Orangekit is mean about it-"

"Well, who knows who your mother is?!" *Thinfur,* Darkkit thought angrily. *He knows.* "You have no right to even be in *ShadowClan*!"

"Shut up, Orangekit," Darkkit interrupted, her yellow eyes slits. "Our father is a warrior of *ShadowClan*. So there."

"Whatever." Orangekit began to dig in, scarfing down the skinny mouse. Darkkit and Shadekit followed, eating smaller portions at a time. Orangekit pushed Darkkit and Shadekit away with her body, until there was only a bit left. Then she sat, letting the smaller kits

finish. A long black cat padded over to them, a cheerful look in his yellow eyes.

"Hey, Shadekit, Darkkit," He nodded to them and continued. "Soon you'll be 'paws. Just two moons!"

"Two whole *moons*?" Shadekit complained. "My fur will be grey by then!"

"It already is," Darkkit snorted, eyeing his dark grey pelt cheekily. Her littermate rolled his eyes and opened his mouth to speak, but the tom spoke quickly, not letting him argue.

"But imagine, Shadekit. After that, we'll be warriors! Are you going to be our mentor, Thinfur?" Darkkit prided herself on looking so much like her father; they had the same yellow eyes and black pelt. Shadekit dark blue eyes and fur the color of dark stones.

"Usually kin wouldn't be mentoring kin," Thinfur said slowly, cocking his head. "But ShadowClan is short on warriors and apprentices, so maybe." *One day* I'll *be leader of ShadowClan,* Darkkit vowed to himself. *And Orangekit will follow* my *command.*

"That would be great!" she mewled, licking her father's ear in compassion. "I hope so!"

"Hmm..." Shadekit paused. "I guess... If you want to be a warrior." *What?! He* doesn't *want to be a warrior?* The black she-kit brushed it off, flicking her long tail.

"Let's play a game!" Darkkit squeaked. Shadekit perked up and immediately began to nip Thinfur's long, skinny tail.

"Ouch!" the warrior yelped, waving his tail. "You naughty kits! I'm a big, bad ThunderClan cat and I'm going to eat you!" He chased them around the camp. Darkkit squealed as he caught up with them, gently batting them with sheathed paws, unlike Orangekit.

"Tell us a story!" Shadekit yelped, giving up. *Yes,* Darkkit thought, looking eagerly up at her kin. *Please?* Just as she was about to ask, Shadekit made a suggestion. "I know! Tell us one about when you defeated that WindClan warrior!" Thinfur scowled suddenly, his tail

fur bristling in annoyance.

"I only killed that warrior to protect Fernstar," he retorted, looking as if he was making himself not yowl at them. "She was sick with greencough when they attacked."

"Those cowards!" Orangekit yowled, joining the other kits. *Hmmph,* Darkkit thought bitterly. *Orangekit is mean all the time, but she still gets to have fun with us.* She scrambled back a bit, seeing her kin's friendly features twisted with anger.

"Ask the elders to tell you a story," Thinfur spat, trodding away. *But there aren't any elders,* Darkkit thought miserably. *Marshheart died a moon ago, and Swamppelt three moons. Thinfur knows that!* She sighed. *Why is he being so mean? It's all Orangekit's fault; she was the one who suggested it, the WindClan fight! But Thinfur* never *talks about it...* She snarled.

"Come *on*, Orangekit! You just ruined i-"

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey come to the Pinebranch!" The kits, although not old enough to catch their own prey, scampered to the Pinebranch, a branch hanging over the leader's den. Fernstar looked down at ShadowClan with the fern-green eyes she was named after.

"I wonder what it is!" Shadekit mewled excitedly. Darkkit covered her littermate's stubby muzzle with her tail.

"Don't talk," she whispered. *Is she...*

"Will Orangekit come up to Pinebranch?" Orangekit froze and stiffly leaped up to the branch, quickly grooming her ruffled fur. *It's her apprentice ceremony!* Darkkit thought enviously. *Whoa!* She scowled. *But she's so mean! Being an apprentice will only make her meaner and bossier, won't it?* "From this day forward, Orangekit will be known as Orangepaw. Thinfur, you will be her mentor." *No fair!* I *wanted him to be* my *mentor!* "I know that you will teach her your kindness and loyalty, along with your quick thinking." Darkkit noticed that Thinfur flinched at 'loyalty'. *Weird,* she thought, pushing it to the back of her head and cheering with her clan.

"Orangepaw! Orangepaw!" ShadowClan shouted happily. Darkkit joined in, chanting her name. *Sometimes Orangek- Orange*paw *is bossy, but she's actually a good friend. And she doesn't really keep the prey to herself* that *much. She deserves this.*

"Congratulations!" she yowled as loudly as she could, catching Orangepaw's excited gaze. *I do feel happy for her,* she decided slowly, *but when will it be* my *turn?*

So that's the first chapter! I hope you liked it! Please comment if there's anything you would like to say, or any constructive criticism!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Two

[image]

Darkkit yawned and blinked her eyes open. Shadekit was curled up beside her, shivering slightly as she moved away. "Shadekit," she murmured. "Shadekit! Don't you remember what today is?"

"Go away," her littermate mumbled. "Me sleeping." Darkkit snorted cheekily and said, "Oh, well. Don't blame me if you miss the apprentice ceremony."

"You're tricking me," he mewled. "Orangepaw-" He jolted up and ripped his eyes open. "You mean *our* apprentice ceremony?! No way!" he began to lick his messy fur. "What if we don't get to be apprentices?" he asked worriedly, shivering. "What if we did something wrong? What if I *woke up* too late? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I just did," Darkkit purred, amused at her littermate. As Thinfur came in, she turned her lithe black head to look at him. He looked at them closely, his tail up with the end tipped downwards in excitement.

"Be ready," he mewed. "I can't believe it, my kits apprentices!" Darkkit purred warmly.

"I want to be the best apprentice ever! And then warrior, and deputy, and leader!" she declared, already planning for her future. "What about you, Shadekit?"

"Actually," he began, "I want to be a medicine cat apprentice. And then a medicine cat." Darkkit stared at him, bewildered as she could be.

"What about *battles?* And *fighting*?" Thinfur smiled as Shadekit replied.

"There's more to being a warrior than that. If we had no medicine cat, who *knows* how bad our injuries would be? And how would we survive, especially with such a small Clan?" he inquired, tipping his head. "Medicine cats are important, too." Darkkit flicked her tail in understanding.

"I hadn't thought of it that way before." she admitted. "I guess you're right."

"I'll be a warrior again," Yowltail muttered from a corner. Her yellowish pelt was matted and dirty, just like all the other exhausted and over-worked ShadowClan warriors, but her amber eyes shone. Darkkit remembered how she and Frogscar had kits, and they all died. Even Frostpaw, the young mediator. She had been giving Shadekit and Darkkit milk.

"Oh, yeah," Shadekit remembered. "And you can have another litter, and I promise that they'll live. *I'll* save them. But I need to be a medicine cat."

"You want to be a medicine cat?" a brown tom asked, overhearing and entering the den made of low and fallen pines.

"Yes," Shadekit replied. "You needed Tallmeadow's help once, right, Treepool?" The brown tom smiled.

"More than once," he corrected the kit. "Medicine cats are important."

"Let's eat!" Darkkit yelped. "Come on!" She didn't notice how small the heap of fresh-kill was, or how some of it was a bit funky-smelling. As she took a bite out of a frog, she murmured, "I'm excited. Shouldn't you tell Tallmeadow about-"

"I already did," Shadekit mewed proudly. Darkkit perked up.

"Really? But you're so... so..."

"Shy? Yes, but I really want this," Shadekit replied. "A *lot*." Darkkit nodded and looked at the tall, trees.

"Soon we'll explore the forest," she mewed. "Even medicine cats

need to know where everything is, especially herbs." She watched as Orangepaw entered the camp, holding a plump frog in her jaws. She proudly set it down on the ground.

"It's *huge,*" Thinfur complimented his apprentice. "Since when have you been going out to hunt?"

"Since it's their naming ceremony," she replied, nodding to Darkkit and Shadekit. "I think Fernstar's calling them right now." The ShadowcCan leader had just leapt onto the Pinebranch, and was closing her eyes. Darkkit noticed that she looked oddly distant.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey come to the Pinebranch!" Fernstar yowled. The ShadowClan cats gathered, and it came to Darkkit's attention how little of them there were. She didn't mind. *I'll be a queen, too,* she decided. *And the nursery will be blooming.* "Darkkit and Shadekit, come to the Pinebranch." Darkkit frowned; was Fernstar going to be gloomy for the whole time? Shadekit followed her onto the branch, his fur bristling in nervousness and his body seeming smaller than usual. *Why is he so worried? Soon, we'll both be apprentices!* She dug her claws in; it was sturdy, although the bark was soft, but beside the skittish ShadowClan leader she felt anything but safe. Her worries flooded in now; what if she couldn't take the pressure of the ceremony? But as she met with Thinfur's proud gaze, she only felt calmness. She would be alright.

"From this day forward, Shadekit will be known as Shadepaw. His mentor will be..." Fernstar scanned the Clan with her gaze. Shadekit glanced at Tallmeadow, tucked his paws under his belly in terror, and shrunk back. "Grassfang. I trust that he will pass on his courage and joy to him." Shadekit froze in disappointment as she continued. *But... He's so determined to be a medicine cat, and he did nothing wrong? What's the matter with you, Fernstar?* "From this day forward, Darkkit will be known as Darkpaw. I will mentor her." Before ShadowClan could start to cheer, Tallmeadow pushed herself forward.

"Fernstar," she protested, "Shadepaw has the future of a medicine cat. StarClan themselves have told me." Fernstar glared at Tallmeadow.

"I said that Shadepaw would be mentored by Grassfang. If StarClan disagrees, they will tell me when I go to the Moonpool." Tallmeadow glared defiantly at their leader.

"Fernstar, I strongly advise against this," Frogscar shouted. "Tallmeadow knows what she's saying." Fernstar snarled at him.

"I am leader, and you will follow my command!" she spat. Darkpaw edged away from the seething leader. *I don't want this! Fernstar as my mentor, and Shadepaw not to follow his dreams?*

"Fernstar!" Thinfur spat. "My kit has his right to at least *try* to be a medicine cat! And if that doesn't convince you, our medicine cat *herself* said that he had a future! A future that does not let him be a warrior!" Fernstar glared at him, baring her sharp teeth.

"No." Her voice was cold and spiteful. *Why?* Darkpaw thought. *Why, Fernstar? Why?*

"If my kit's future is harmed by this, I will take your last life myself," Thinfur yowled. "And Darkpaw should have a proper mentor, not a crazed old fool!" Smoke practically came out his roundish ears as Fernstar scowled. Darkpaw shrunk back, still on the branch. Shadepaw looked at her worriedly, helping Darkpaw think her thought. *Why does Fernstar hate us?*

Ta-da!!! Please comment if you liked this.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Three

[image]

Darkpaw sighed at the news. She had no interest in going to a gathering with Shadepaw if they were both unhappy. Only she, Shadepaw, Tallmeadow, Fernstar and Barkpool had been allowed to go. She sighed again; why couldn't Fernstar just let them be? The ShadowClan leader had pushed her to be the *perfect* apprentice, dishing out prey and battling fiercely, but she hadn't let Darkpaw just *live* for one moment. She frowned. She had been Dark*paw* for a moon, but she hadn't been happy for one second. Wasn't being an apprentice supposed to be great, even with the responsibilities such as collecting moss? Or was she just mistaken? "Look," she murmured to Shadepaw.

"It's the island," he mewed. "I wish I could be there as a *medicine* cat apprentice." Darkpaw paused, not knowing what to say, when a question popped up into her mind.

"Er... We have to *get* to the island..."

"There's a tree," Barkpool mewed. "We walk across it. Remember to dig your claws in deep; sometimes it's slippery."

"Okay," Darkpaw responded. Shadepaw also nodded, unsheathing her claws. When Darkpaw caught sight of the tree, she gasped. "How many other cats *are* there?" she asked.

"A lot, I'm guessing," Shadepaw snorted. Darkpaw ran onto the fallen tree and dug her claws in, slowly making her way across it. Shadepaw followed, right behind her. He suddenly slipped and Darkpaw instinctively grabbed him by the scruff, heaving to pull him up. As he collapsed on the log, she began to drag him behind her.

"It's alright. Thanks, though," Shadepaw muttered. They reached the island soon after that, following the rest of their Clan. They froze as they spotted all the other cats, bundled together, chatting. "I'm

going to talk to the medicine cat apprentices," Shadepaw decided. "I can gather knowledge and impress Fernstar. And then she might let me be one of them." He trodded off towards Tallmeadow, and Darkpaw went towards a group of apprentices.

"Hi," she mewed. "I'm Darkpaw."

"Hi! I'm Bushpaw! We're from ThunderClan! This is Slatepaw, Stonepaw and Spotpaw! Where are you fr-"

"ShadowClan?" Slatepaw guessed. "Sneaks. Hmmph." Darkpaw's jaw dropped.

"*What*?!" She snarled and bunched her shoulders, walking towards another apprentice. "Hello," she mewed. This apprentice was a handsome silver-grey colour, and had dark blue eyes just like her littermate.

"Hi. I'm Arrowpaw," the apprentice muttered. "RiverClan. You?"

"ShadowClan. I'm Darkpaw,"

"Nice name," Arrowpaw commented. "Mine's as good as kittypet food. First time?" It took Darkpaw a second to realize what he was talking about.

"To a gathering? Yeah. Is it yours?" *He's pretty confident-looking,* she mused slowly. *It's probably not.* She flicked her ears in interest.

"Nah. I've been here twice. This is my second time. I've been an apprentice for two moons; Coralstar must like me to let me here twice in a row. There aren't a lot of ShadowClan cats," he muttered, observing her Clan.

"Yeah. Our last elder died from greencough a moon ago, and Fernstar definitely doesn't want any medicine cats around." She rolled her eyes. "Tallmeadow literally *said* that my littermate had a future as a medicine cat, and she ignored her! And now our *crazy leader* is my mentor. Who's yours?" The RiverClan tom paused, as if wondering if he should announce the name of his mentor or not. *Seriously, I'm not trying to attack any Clan!* Darkpaw thought, annoyed.

"Mosstail." The black she-cat paused.

"You're not very talkative, are you?" she asked him. He snorted.

"Well, if we knew each other, I would be."

"Why were you named Arrowpaw?" Darkpaw tipped her head, aiming for a conversation with this seemingly nice tom. He flicked his ears down, showing them both ripped and looking like arrowheads. "Oh."

"They're speaking," Arrowpaw mewed. Darkpaw angled her ears to get a better hearing of the leaders.

"All is well in SkyClan," Rainstar yowled, shooting Fernstar a smug look and puffing out his chest in arrogance. Darkpaw held herself back from snapping something at him. "WindClan?"

"There's lots of prey despite leaf-bare. We are strong." Quickstar declared loudly, smirking slightly. "Unlike ShadowClan, it looks like." Darkpaw ignored this comment.

"We have lots of fish and our bellies are full. We are prepared to defend our territory, and we will let everyone know that they should not try to steal it." Arrowpaw puffed out his chest proudly and an orange cat began to speak.

"ThunderClan is powerful!" Strikestar mewed. "We have a new apprentice, Bushpaw."

"Bushpaw! Bushpaw!" the cats cried in unison. All heads turned to Fernstar.

"We have two new apprentices, Shadepaw and Darkpaw. Yowltail is returning to her warrior duties."

"Shadepaw! Darkpaw! Yowltail!"

"However, there have been issues." Darkpaw tensed herself. "Tallmeadow thinks that Shadepaw should be a medicine cat, our elder is dead, prey is scarce, and monsters have been disturbing the prey." Darkpaw scowled. After the other Clans boasting, Fernstar

was practically inviting them to attack. What was with her leader? Her fur bristled as she caught SkyClan's hostile gazes. *If they attack us, they'll see that we'll beat them, no matter how weak we are!* "That is all. ShadowClan, we will leave now." Darkpaw turned to Arrowpaw.

"See ya," she said. He nodded and they both padded off, going in their separate directions.

She stumbled over a root, nearly at camp. "Fox dung!" An owl hooted overhead, and she scampered off. Why had she tripped? Usually she would never miss a loose rock or root; she always looked where she was heading! The forest seemed more ominous than usual as she ran through it. The wind in her fur made her fall once again. *Ugh!* Her ears pricked, knowing the gathering patrol was someone nearby. She hissed softly, seeing Fernstar through the dense green pines. *Did everyone see me fall? Twice?* She rolled her eyes. It was a simple mistake; she was overreacting. But as she joined the other cats, a question entered her mind.

I wonder why I was so distracted?

I think that this was a pretty successful chapter... It was the hardest so far. What about you guys? What do you think about Arrowpaw and Slatepaw all the others? Please comment.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Four

[image]

"Help!" Treepool yowled, rushing into the camp. He had been sent out on a border patrol. "Help!" he repeated, his usually confident voice wavering. "SkyClan is attacking!" Darkpaw froze in shock. This was all Fernstar's fault! A half-moon had passed since the gathering, and the whole of ShadowClan had been waiting for this.

"Everyone! Come!" Fernstar ordered, bunching her shoulders and leaping towards Treepool. "Where?" Treepool ran off into the forest.

"Wait! Grassfang, stay here with... Dar- no... Badgerfang!" Frogscar ordered. "Yowl if they come to the camp." He nodded briefly and ran after Treepool. Darkpaw glanced worriedly at her surroundings, then followed the rest of her Clan to a muddy swamp nearish to the SkyClan border.

"There are so many important herbs here," Shadepaw yowled frantically, his fur spiking and his ears flattening. The smell of fear and anger drafted up Darkpaw's nose. "Tallmeadow needs them!" The medicine cat nodded and began to gather some. Shadepaw blinked and grabbed something with his teeth, handing it to Tallmeadow. "Poppy seeds... For... Uh, pain," he stammered. Darkpaw smiled, in spite of her terror. He was still following his dream.

Her smile faded quickly as SkyClan cats slunk towards them, jumping down from the pines. Rainstar was in the lead, a snarl on his muzzle. He stepped forward and lifted his chin arrogantly. Darkpaw forced herself not to swipe him. *This is* ShadowClan *territory!* She thought fiercely, a growl rising from her throat.

"Give up now or be beaten!" the grey tom spat. "We have the smallest territory beside the lake because all those moons ago, Rowanstar didn't give us enough!" Darkpaw froze, finally noticing

how many SkyClan cats were there. Had Rainstar brought *all* of them? SkyClan apprentices and warriors surrounded the ShadowClan cats. Only two left at camp, but they were seriously outnumbered!

"Never!" Fernstar drew her lips back in a snarl. "ShadowClan, *attack*!" Darkpaw didn't question her leader's orders for once; without blinking she launched herself at two apprentices. They clawed her sides and she winced, thinking fast. She rolled over on the ground and sprang up, jaws snapping at the larger one's belly. He yowled with pain and the other one fastened her claws in Darkpaw's back, digging deep. She screeched in pain and stumbled under his weight, then managed to roll over, making him fall. She jumped up, protecting her belly, and then countered by jumping onto *his* back. She clawed him until he rolled over, and stabbed her claws at him. A heavy weight crashed into her back as she was about to repeat the movement. It was the bigger cat! The one she was clawing glared at her and scampered away.

"Help! *Darkpaw*!" Shadepaw's voice cried. Darkpaw stole a glance at her brother; two warriors were taunting him and closing in.

"I'm c-" The other apprentice bothering her gnashed his teeth, snapping at her neck, and she ran. Her long legs carried her as fast as the wind. *I'm so fast!* She looked back to see Yowltail raking the apprentice with her claws.

"Stay away from ShadowClan!" she was growling, fire in her amber eyes. Darkpaw breathed thankfully and ran at one of the warriors. She saw a flash of orange and met with Orangepaw's eyes.

"I'll help," the she-cat explained rapidly. "Come on." She flicked her tail, and they rushed at the warriors, their claws unsheathed and their fangs bared. Darkpaw heard a scream as the warrior she was attacking raked his claw across her side. She turned, yowling in pain, and froze as she saw Frogscar's body falling to the bloody ground, Rainstar's teeth clamped on his neck.

Okay, that was a *really* short chapter, but I liked that ending. What will happen next? Is he dead, or can Tallmeadow help him? Is Shadpaw okay? Does this mean that SkyClan has won,

or will they continue to fight?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Five

[image]

The warrior attacking Darkpaw didn't stop; he turned around, aiming a deadly blow at Shadepaw's neck. Tallmeadow yowled, "*Stop*! You cannot harm that cat!" She ran into the battle and grabbed Darkpaw's littermate by the scruff. "Rainstar! You have killed a noble warrior and a caring deputy. You have won this battle." Before Fernstar could protest, the medicine cat continued, "ShadowClan, retreat! This is a battle for another day!"

...

"You must let him," Tallmeadow pleaded as ShadowClan walked back. "Shadepaw's destiny is not being a warrior. It is to save his Clanmates." Fernstar scowled.

"I have my reasons, Tallmeadow. You know who that cat looks like."

"He isn't Shadeflight," Tallmeadow mewed. Thinfur stiffened.

"Who's Shadeflight?" Darkpaw inquired, peering at her father.

"He was a ShadowClan cat... A very close friend of Fernstar's. But he was... not... good. He was a Dark Forest cat, through and through. Remember the legends about Thistleclaw and Tigerstar?"

"Tigerclaw-Tigerstar? Yes. And Thistleclaw... Yeah. Funny how ThunderClan thinks they solve all the problems for the Clans- all the troublemakers *come* from them."

"Hah," Thinfur mewed. "True. So Shadeflight was evil; he killed a huge part of the Clans before Fernstar killed him. But Fernstar believes that your littermate is Shadeflight reborn. They look exactly alike; they even both have a broken tooth. And the same one."

"Oh. So that's why..." Darkpaw trailed off. *Why Fernstar hates me.*

"No." Thinfur mewed. She flicked her ears, surprised. "Fernstar wanted me to be her mate. So when I introduced you two kits to the Clan, she was furious. She almost killed me. So she takes it out on you and Shadepaw. But especially Shadepaw, since he looks so much like Shadeflight. You know," Thinfur added, "he even acts like Shadeflight did before he turned."

"Fine," Fernstar spat suddenly, and Darkpaw jerked her head up. After Thinfur's nearly silent mewing, Fernstar's yowl was a jolt to her ears. "You *do* need an apprentice. You're growing old." Tallmeadow frowned but said nothing. *Fernstar acts like a kit,* Darkpaw decided. *A very big kit, but still. A kit.* She perked up, realizing what Fernstar was saying.

"So Shadepaw can be-"

"Shadepaw has one chance," Fernstar hissed. "If, by a moon, he isn't ready to be a full medicine cat, he will return to this- being a *warrior* apprentice." Tallmeadow spun around, snarling. Darkpaw flinched back at the friendly medicine cat's sudden rage.

"Fernstar, you *foxheart*," she spat, "*No* cat has *ever* learned to be a warrior or a medicine cat in a single *moon*! Foxdung, you don't even care! All that matters to you is... I don't even *know* anymore! Ugh!" Tallmeadow ran ahead of the other cats, to camp.

...

"Will he be alright?" Darkpaw asked worriedly. Tallmeadow shook her head soberly, her eyes distant and sad.

"Frogscar is dead. Fernstar will have to appoint a new deputy soon. It's almost moonhigh." Darkpaw paused. *I meant Shadepaw... I didn't even* think *about Frogscar!*

"What about Shadepaw?"

"I don't know. That last blow surely would've killed him, but he still might..." she trailed off and looked at Shadepaw's body, lying in the middle of her den.

"Come!" Fernstar yowled. *Now, she doesn't even say the proper words to gather the Clan,* Darkpaw thought angrily. *Oh, I hope Shadepaw will be okay. Please, StarClan, don't let him die!* "Time has come to appoint the new deputy. We grieve for Frogscar. The new deputy will be..." Fernstar paused, as if thinking.

"Has she even decided yet?" Orangepaw muttered in Darkpaw's ear.

"Who knows?" she muttered back.

"Thinfur," Fernstar finished, leaving to her den. The Clan cast Frogscar to StarClan and deputized Thinfur. Darkpaw pressed her nose to Frogscar's cooling fur. *I'm sorry, Frogscar. This never should have happened!* Rage filled her heart, twisted with grief. *You wouldn't be dead and Shadepaw wouldn't be dying if Fernstar hadn't made us look so weak at the gathering. This is* all *her fault!* She clenched her teeth and stepped back.

"I'll see you one day, in StarClan," she promised more calmly, dipping her head. She padded to Thinfur. Her father was deputy- it was hard to imagine. She flicked her tail.

"Fernstar must think that you're a great warrior to make you deputy!" Darkpaw mewed, forcing herself to sound cheerful. *Just for Thinfur. Just for Thinfur.* Her father tipped his head to one side.

"I guess..." He sounded oddly doubtful, but nuzzled her head. "You should go see your brother. Those were amazing fighting moves you used- Frogscar would be proud." Darkpaw mewed something and obeyed, padding over to the medicine den.

"Shadepaw," Darkpaw murmured, sitting beside him. "Thinfur is the new deputy. Aren't you happy? And when you recover, Fernstar will give you a chance to be a medicine cat. Isn't that great?" Shadepaw didn't stir. Darkpaw stifled back a wail. *StarClan, no! Let Shadepaw recover, and soon!*

Okay, I think that was a good-sized chapter? Should I try to make them longer, or is this size alright?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Six

[image]

Darkpaw sighed. Another moon of Shadepaw's silence. Two moons had passed since Frogscar's death; she had stayed to protect the Clan instead of going to the gatherings. "Shadepaw," she murmured. The dark grey tom let out a rattly breath. "Did I come too late? Please, Shadepaw..."

"Darkpaw," Orangepaw mewed from the den entrance, looking apologetic. Shadepaw's tail twitched. "Fernstar wants to tell you something... Good luck," the orange she-cat added darkly.

"Fernstar?" Darkpaw called, thanking Orangepaw quickly and heading for Fernstar's den. She sighed as she was out of Orangepaw's hearing, and then padded in, looking up at the grey leader. "You called for me?"

"Darkpaw," Fernstar rasped. "As you know, I have whitecough, and I am on my last life. You needn't worry." Darkpaw snorted. *Like I care!* "But I have noticed you, always with Shadepaw. Your loyalty lies either in ShadowClan or in Shadepaw, not both." Her beautiful eyes glittered like blue tourmalines. "Go now."

"What!" Darkpaw snapped, disobeying her leader and rasing her hackles. "Shadepaw is my littermate, and he's loyal to ShadowClan! I *can* be loyal to both!" Her leader scowled, obviously angry at the apprentice's disobedience.

"One day, you will have to choose," she warned, closing her eyes briefly. "Beware where your heart lies."

"You realized you just changed the topic from Shadepaw to my whole entire future?" Darkpaw snapped. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about your future, Darkpaw," Fernstar murmured distantly. "Get out," she ordered. Darkpaw slowly backed away. The

grey she-cat hissed with fury. "*Stay* out!"

"Shadepaw!" Darkpaw yowled, running to her littermate. "Shadepaw. Fernstar hates us because of you being like Shadeflight and Thinfur's not being her mate. Our leader hates us! Please, Shadepaw, I need you. I need you *right now*. Get better. Wake up!" She let out a wail.

"Darkpaw," Tallmeadow murmured, coming into the den. "You're here." Darkpaw ignored her, studying the den solemnly. It was made of overhanging bramble branches, and Tallmeadow stored herbs in the little dents in the wall. *Shadepaw should've been able to store herbs, too! He should have been a medicine cat!* A wave of rage flooded through her bones. "*Darkpaw*!" Tallmeadow's newest mew snapped Darkpaw back to life. "Don't worry. He'll be better."

"He will?" Her head shot up, and suddenly her rage turned to hope, twisting her heart. "Really?" She widened her sharp yellow eyes. "*Really*, Tallmeadow?"

"Yes," Tallmeadow purred. "Soon." Darkpaw trembled with relief; Shadepaw would live! *Thank StarClan,* she thought wondrously. "But you've been neglecting your training," the medicine cat added. "You need to focus on one thing at a time."

"Stop it!" Darkpaw nearly spat. "He's my littermate! Why does everyone try to make me forget about him?" Before Tallmeadow could reply, Darkpaw continued, "Fine." and walked out the den. *Why? Why does everyone think I can't be loyal to both?* she wondered, her fur flattening, but more than usual. *Am I being selfish, or is there an actual reason?*

"Fernstar," she snapped, poking her head into Fernstar's den. "I'm going hunting."

"Good for you," her leader rolled her eyes. It was as if she had forgotten their earlier conversation. *Maybe she has,* Darkpaw thought, studying the paler grey hairs on her muzzle. *She's growing old. I wouldn't put memory loss past her.* "Go with Orangepaw and Thinfur," Fernstar continued. Darkpaw simply nodded; this was a good choice, as ShadowClan needed prey.

"... Grassfang and Treepool," Thinfur was meowing in the clearing, some warriors and Orangepaw gathered around him.

"Okay," Grassfang responded. "We'll be especially careful on the SkyClan border." Thinfur nodded.

"Don't trespass," he warned. "We don't want another fight."

"We weren't planning on it," Treepool scowled. "Why are you always so quick to-"

"Thinfur!" Darkpaw interrupted. The last thing the Clan needed was an argument. "You, Orangepaw and I are supposed to go hunting!"

"Okay," Thinfur mewed, flicking his tail. "Treepool, I didn't mean it like that; it's just that I know *I* would want to trespass, to show those fox-hearts that we won't be pushed around." His eyes shone with embarrasment as he finished. Treepool sighed.

"Yeah, okay, Thinfur." Darkpaw bounded into the forest, not wanting the argument to escalate. Treepool's fur was bristling, even though the brown tom was saying nothing.

"Come *on*, Orangepaw and Thinfur!" The two cats followed her out the camp, and she lifted her head proudly.. "Where should we go?" Darkpaw asked, deciding that it would be rude not to ask.

"How about the Dead Tree?" Orangepaw suggested. Thinfur flicked his tail.

"Sure." They stopped walking when they came to a marsh with a dead tree spiraling up from the middle. Although it was dead, it was oddly sturdy, with dark brown wood and tall grass springing up from the sides of the marsh. Darkpaw smiled slightly; she liked this place, as it had lots of herbs, and made Shadepaw happy. She narrowed her eyes, spotting a few toads.

"There," she whispered. Slowly stalking the slimy creatures, hidden by the tall grass, she lightly stepped into the marsh. She liked the feeling of it wreathing around her toes, and it helped hide her scent- not that the toads could smell her. She could see Orangepaw beside her, and Thinfur silently following them. She waited to

perfectly pinpoint her prey's location; she couldn't fail in front of Orangepaw and her kin! Suddenly, she leaped, her claws unsheathed. She sunk them into the toad's smooth hide and tried for another; it began to hop away, and she scowled. A flash of dark orange leaped after the toad, and she saw Orangepaw, with the fresh-kill in her teeth.

"That's both of them," Thinfur mewed from the grass, revealing himself. Darkpaw nodded and ran over to the edge of the marsh, burying the frog in the swampy grass. Orangepaw copied her.

"Heh," the older apprentice chortled. "Didn't think you would actually catch it." Darkpaw ignored her and sniffed the air. "Is there..."

"There isn't anything else," she confirmed. "Let's go deeper into the woods. There might be something." As they trotted through the pines, Darkpaw felt happy. *I wish every day would be like this. Happy, with barely a worry, and prey.*

I tried to make the training interesting, as I haven't really shown it. Was it? Is there anything I'm forgetting?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Seven

[image]

Shadepaw's deep, dark blue eyes opened slowly. "Shadepaw!" Darkpaw exclaimed. "You're awake!"

"Wha- How long-"

"Since Frogscar died... Two moons and nearly a half-moon." Shadepaw's eyes widened and he rolled over, staggering to his paws.

"I have to convince... Fernstar... To let me..."

"Shadepaw!" Tallmeadow cried. "We have good news! Your allowed to be my apprentice!" Her face darkened. "But you have to be ready in a moon. Ready to be a full medicine cat."

"Wait, Shadepaw, Thinfur's deputy now!" Darkpaw added. "Our *kin*!"

"Whoa," Shadepaw murmured. "So when do I-"

"You're ready to start learning," Tallmeadow began to explain, "but you must be careful not to push yourself to far for the next few days."

"I am? That's no problem! Let's start!" Shadepaw exclaimed. Darkpaw grinned toothily and padded over to Fernstar.

"Shadepaw's awake," she mewed.

"Hmm. Then his medicine cat trial begins. Tonight will be the half-moon, and he will go to share tongues with Starclan." Fernstar paused and let out a low chuckle. "We'll see what the Dark Forest says to him." As she began to walk away, Darkpaw hissed to herself. *That settles it,* she decided. *Fernstar is mad!*

...

"Faster!" Fernstar snapped. "You're too slow! A Skyclan patrol would've caught you by now! Duck! *Harder*!" Darkpaw panted.

"One minute..."

"Windclan wouldn't *give* you a minute!" the leader shouted. *Give me a break!* Darkpaw thought angrily. *I've been training since moon-high!*

"Can I *sleep*, at least?" she mewed. Fernstar glared at her.

"No! You must tr-"

"Darkpaw! What are you doing still awake?" Tallmeadow scolded, entering the camp. "And Fernstar! Are you *encouraging* her? She needs to rest!" Darkpaw scowled.

"I *want* t- Wait! Shadepaw, what did Starclan say?" she inquired. Her littermate perked up, and looked to Fernstar for permission.

"Go ahead. Did Tigerstar speak to you?" the leader asked.

"Stop it!" Darkpaw hissed. "He met with Starclan, not the Dark Forest!" She looked at him. His grey shape was silhouetted in the moonlight, and his blue eyes shone eerily. "What did they say?"

"Half Moon, a she-cat from the ancient clan, talked to me," he began excitedly. "All that time back! She told me she was glad that I was finally fulfilling my destiny as a medicine cat, and she blessed me. She told me that a cat named Jay Wing and another called Pebble Heart would help me become a full medicine cat. But," he took a breath for air, "Half Moon also said that I would need more than a moon." They all looked at Fernstar.

"Did she introduce you to Jay Wing and Pebble Heart?" she asked, oblivious to their staring. Shadepaw paused before answering.

"Yes," he mewed quietly. "Is that bad?" He looked fearfully at Tallmeadow, who shook her head. Fernstar scowled and silkily mewed, "So they'll help you."

"*What*? Even Starclan won't be able to help him learn everything in a *moon*!" Darkpaw exploded. "That's... That's... That's *mousebrained*!"

Shadepaw froze.

"Darkpaw," he murmured, "it's okay. Half Moon said that if she has to, she'll tell Fernstar herself."

"Still." Tallmeadow sighed.

"Darkpaw, Shadepaw, go and sleep."

"Fine," Darkpaw mewed crossly. "But I want to talk to Shadepaw." Tallmeadow nodded. Fernstar rolled her eyes and walked away, followed by Tallmeadow.

"Don't worry. It'll be fine," she whispered. Shadepaw looked into Darkpaw's eyes.

"Come. I want to tell you something." Darkpaw nodded, confused, and trotted after him into the medicine den. "I have to tell you this." Shadepaw hesitated and went on. "Half Moon told me a prophecy."

"*What*?!" Darkpaw nearly shouted. "That's great! Why didn't you tell Fernstar, though?"

"What Half Moon said was not for her ears." Shadepaw murmured. "*Beware the lake and beware the moon, for despair is coming. Only shadows can save you now.*" Shadepaw, who had closed his eyes, suddenly opened them. "*Destruction is coming. The lake will die.*"

MWA HA HA!!! Prophecies all the way! I tried not to make this any more obvious than Erin Hunter's prophecies. Please comment and say if you think it's any good.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Eight

[image]

Darkpaw gasped. "What does it mean? 'The lake will *die'*? Huh? 'Only shadows can save you now'? It can't mean ShadowClan... Just *look* at us!" Shadepaw sighed, his deep eyes shutting in confusion.

"I don't know. But Half Moon also said that nobody could change our destinies, and that we shouldn't tell this to Fernstar, or the other medicine cats. I did tell Tallmeadow, though. She said I should tell you." Darkpaw bit her lip. She needed an *answer.*

"But wha-"

"Do you know?" Tallmeadow asked, coming in the den. Darkpaw nodded slightly. "Good. I have a feeling it has to do with you." Darkpaw's eyes widened.

"*Me*?"

"Yes, you," The medicine cat looked amused at her question.

"But... Why me?" Darkpaw had to ask. "What's so... special... about *me*?"

Shadepaw shifted his paws.

"Well," he began, "the first thing is that StarClan sent the prophecy to *me,* and not an older, more experienced cat. They must trust young cats more right now. Maybe it's because we aren't as rooted to the lake- the prophecy makes it seem like we'll have to leave." Darkpaw stepped back. Leave *the lake?* she thought in anguish. *No, he's wrong- it's the most mouse-brained thing I've ever heard of!* Shadepaw continued, his tail tip twitching. "Then there's the fact that they sent it to a ShadowClan cat."

"Which means that it must be about some cat in ShadowClan," Darkpaw finished. Tallmeadow nodded.

"Most likely."

"But there are other young cats- Orangepaw, *you*!" Darkpaw hesitated. "And there's nothing special about me."

"But there *is*," Tallmeadow jumped in. Darkpaw blinked, listening closely. "You don't know who your mother is." She looked apologetic as Darkpaw recoiled. "As far as we know, you could be half-clan. But it seems that StarClan doesn't trust deeply rooted cats right now. Maybe they want the Clans to change; I don't know. But it increases the chances of you being the apprentice."

"But what about Shadepaw?" Darkpaw asked. It was Shadepaw who answered.

"I almost died, just before I got the prophecy. And StarClan could have easily sent me the prophecy earlier, so that I could become a medicine cat apprentice- Half Moon said herself that she was glad I was a medicine cat apprentice now, and that all of StarClan was- but then it could have easily been me. I don't know about you, but I think that my almost dying was a sign from StarClan that I'm not the apprentice from the prophecy."

Darkpaw's brow furrowed.

"You make good points, both of you," she admitted, "but I don't think it's me. It could be almost any cat. So I'm not going to jump to conclusions."

She wasn't going to. But inside, she *was* brimming with excitement. Shadepaw was *really* an official medicine cat apprentice now- he had recieved a prophecy from StarClan!

...

"I want to go to the gathering," Darkpaw told her mentor. "Can I?" Fernstar thought for a moment.

"Fine." She leaped onto the Hanging Branch. "Let all cats gather at the Hanging Branch!" *Now every cat is old enough to catch their own prey,* Darkpaw thought. *But Badgerleap... She's getting old... Maybe she'll be an elder soon.* As ShadowClan gathered, Tallmeadow padded

over her.

"Have you thought about the prophecy at all? Do you think you know what it means?" she whispered. Darkpaw guiltily murmured, "No." *Is that wrong?*

"Oh. Just... wondering." Fernstar coughed loudly and Tallmeadow quietly told Darkpaw, "Her whitecough is getting worse..." Darkpaw swept her tail across the forest floor worriedly, mixed with the odd satisfaction that the prophecy meant older cats trusting her enough to tell her things.

"Tallmeadow, Darkpaw, Orangepaw and Shadepaw will go."

"No warriors?" Thinfur asked her. As deputy, he should've been beside her on the branch, but no one wanted to catch the ShadowClan leader's worsening whitecough. "And I'm not sure if you should go," he added. "Your whiteco-" Fernstar gave him a withering glare, her teal-and-green eyes holding a thin note of terror. *She might die from this,* Darkpaw realized.

"SkyClan is our enemy now, and we must guard the camp. And if I don't go, we will look weak." Thinfur recoiled, shocked.

"You have whitecough; you could pass it on to the other Clans!"

"I haven't passed it on to anyone in ShadowClan. If I do, I might worry." Fernstar snapped. Her paws trembled slightly, as if she was scared. "Come." The walk to the island was not nearly as pleasant as Darkpaw's first. The cats were completely silent, and Darkpaw wondered what Fernstar would say about Shadepaw. She was glad to see Arrowpaw's face as they arrived, and she ran over to him.

"Hi!" she yowled.

"Hi," he repeated. "It's a weird word, isn't it? Hi. Hi. Hi hi hi hi hi hi. Doesn't it sound weird?" he asked. Darkpaw shrugged, surprised at his sudden chattiness. *Maybe it's because we know each other more now,* she decided, then nodded to herself. *Yeah, that must be it.*

"It's pretty random. I don't really think about it," she replied.

"Huh. It is. Are they going to start?"

"The leaders? I guess..." It was hard for Darkpaw to focus while staring into Arrowpaw's meaningful dark eyes. She barely heard when RiverClan announced a kit being born. She snapped into focus when she heard Shadepaw's name.

"...Shadepaw has decided to be a medicine cat apprentice," Fernstar was mewing, breaking down for a cough. The Clan cats shifted uneasily. "That is all."

"Wait!" Tallmeadow snarled, lifting her head and stepping forward. "That's *not* all! Tell them about your mouse-brained requirement!" Fernstar hissed.

"Be quiet!"

"Silencing your medicine cat?" a raspy voice spat. "Not smart." Darkpaw turned to see a young tabby tom glaring at something. He looked quite handsome, with broad shoulders, but his eyes ruined his image. They were looking in opposite directions.

"Snarlfang!" Strikestar snapped, the great ginger tom narrowing his eyes. "I'm sorry. I don't know what has gotten into him."

"*I* do!" Snarlfang shouted. "A fellow medicine cat being ignored! StarClan save us! StarClan save us all!" His wild eyes drooped to look at the ground. "Strikestar! You cannot silence me!" Darkpaw cocked her head. Gasps filled the air as the ThunderClan medicine cat continued. "StarClan is against us!"

Chapter Nine

[image]

Shadepaw sprang forward before Darkpaw could speak. "Snarlfang is right!" he cried, his eyes wide with distress. "Half Moon is here right now! Listen to her!"

"What do you mean?" a WindClan elder asked. "Who's that?"

"Half Moon is from the ancient Clan! She's here right now! Can't you see her? She's right there, right there!" Shadepaw frantically pointed his tail to a small tree sprouting up from the ground. "*Right there*!" he wailed. "Can't you see her? This is important!" Quickstar laughed.

"There's no-"

"I see her!" Darkpaw cried. "I see her!" A white she-cat was walking out from behind the tree. "Shadepaw's right!"

"He is," Thinfur agreed. *Thinfur*?

"You disobeyed my orders!" Fernstar yowled, her eyes tinged with fury. "Go back to camp *right now*!"

"I only did because we scented badger when we patrolled, and we wanted to warn you. It's on the trail that you usually use to get back from the gatherings. But I see her, I see Half Moon!" Half Moon drew herself up on two paws.

"Thinfur. Rabbitear needs you. She is in danger." She began to dissolve into the air. "StarClan is against you. Snarlfang speaks the truth." Before she completely disappeared, she whispered, "Solve everything. Follow the brightest star..."

"Wait!" Shadepaw yowled. "Who is that? What star? *Why is StarClan against us*?" Half Moon's expression saddened, and with a burst of light, she was gone.

"Oh no..." Thinfur staggered a bit. "No, she's safe, she's safe..." Darkpaw suddenly realized that Arrowpaw was watching her.

"What..." he muttered. "Who's that red warrior? The one sitting with ThunderClan?" Darkpaw looked at him closely.

"There's no red warrior that hasn't been here before," Darkpaw mewed. "Maybe they're like Half Moon..." Arrowpaw's ears and eyes were intently fixed on a spot of air.

"No," he muttered. "No, they haven't. What's it to you?" Darkpaw flinched before realizing the young tom wasn't talking to her. His eyes briefly widened and he flexed his claws. "That's right," he spat. "Why- Oh. How do you know my name?" He stopped, as if listening. "Huh. Sure. Who are you? Are you from StarClan?" *What's happening? It seems interesting,* Darkpaw mused. "Why- what... *Foxdung,*" he swore. "She's gone." *She?* Darkpaw felt an odd jealousy spring inside of her. She ignored it.

"It's a trick!" Rainstar mewed. Coralstar rolled her eyes.

"RiverClan, let's go. And Arrowpaw... Once we're back, tell me about that red she-cat." Arrowpaw's gaze flicked to Darkpaw.

"Sure, Coralstar. Darkpaw," he added quietly, "try to be here at the next gathering." Darkpaw's stomach fluttered.

"O-okay, y-yes, I will..." she stammered as Arrowpaw walked away. He looked at her and nodded.

"Us too," Fernstar snapped. "Darkpaw, Shadepaw and Thinfur, we need to talk. We'll take a different route back. We are in no state to take on a badger." *You said you came because you* didn't *want to sound weak! Liar!* Darkpaw thought.

...

"That's outrageous! You still won't let Shadepaw-" Fernstar flashed her teeth at Tallmeadow. "Fox-heart," she muttered as she left the clearing.

"We weren't lying!" Thinfur hissed. "Half Moon was there!"

"You're kin, and ShadowClan is weak. Maybe you aren't loyal," Fernstar mused. "Maybe you-"

"This is mouse-brained. You clearly aren't going to believe us. Come on, Shadepaw and Thinfur. We should sleep." Darkpaw spat, walking away with unsheathed claws. Thinfur seemed oddly quiet. *Who's Rabbitear?* Darkpaw wondered to herself. She didn't ask Thinfur; he was probably tired. She placed herself on a bed of moss and closed her eyes, dreaming about StarClan, Half Moon and Arrowpaw.

Darkpaw yawned, waking up. Fernstar's call had woken her early, but she didn't mind. It was a new day, full of new possibilities. "Why d'ya call us?" Badgerleap complained. Fernstar looked at her thoughtfully.

"It's your news... And mine," she explained. *Badgerleap's news? Huh?* Darkpaw thought. "Badgerleap is moving to the elder's den," Fernstar announced. "Badgerleap?" The she-cat moved forward.

"I have led a full life as a queen and a warrior," she mewed. "My mate is dead, and the elder's den is empty. I can feel tiredness in my bones and my heart tells me that I have my full right to now turn to the elder's den." There was silence before ShadowClan began to chant, "Badgerleap! Badgerleap!"

"Where's Thinfur?" Shadepaw asked worriedly.

"Now, *my* news," Fernstar rasped. Darkpaw hissed. Badgerleap couldn't even have a proper ceremony? "Thinfur disappeared during the night. His scent trail led to the Dead Tree, where he must've hidden his scent, because it ended there." Darkpaw gasped. *What? Thinfur's* gone*?*

Hope you liked this chapter! Please, guys, write a comment or two, or vote this chapter- don't be silent fans!

Chapter Ten

[image]

"We have to find him!" Darkpaw yowled anxiously. "He must have left a scent!"

"Wait," Shadepaw murmured. "No. StarClan doesn't want us to. I can feel it."

"StarClan is *against* us!" Darkpaw protested bitterly. Shadepaw sighed and looked at Darkpaw determinedly.

"Maybe they are," he meowed solemnly. "Maybe they are. But that doesn't mean they don't still guide our pawsteps; it means we are making bad choices." Darkpaw let out a wail and ran into the dark pine forest, feeling stares heat up her thin pelt

"I can't do this!" she yowled to the woods. "I don't want this, any of this! Please, StarClan, it isn't you; it's the pressure, the prophecy, the uncertainty!" She sunk to the ground, digging her claws into a twig. "No!" she exploded furiously. "It *is* you! You think you're so wonderful! You think you help us, and we believe you! Well, *I won't be fooled*!" She took a deep breath before continuing. "You're *liars*! I know you are!" She let out a furious screech. "*Liars*!"

A bird chirped in the background and she lowered herself deeper into the ground. She closed her eyes. *Stop it, Darkpaw. You're a mouse-brained foxheart.* "I can't do this," she mumbled, getting up and spitting out dirt. She turned her head and began to lick her dirt-covered fur, letting the soothing feeling of her tongue calm her. She closed her eyes again, and when she opened them, she looked up at the sky. "I know you're there somewhere, even without the stars," she mewed in a level voice. "I know you can hear me." She sighed and padded through the pines, sniffing for prey.

"Darkpaw," a voice called. The apprentice spun around, her fur bristling.

"Who are you?" she spat at a yellow tom. "Why are you in ShadowClan territory? Are you one of those SkyClan cats?" She studied the intruder; he looked well-muscled. She drew her lips back in a snarl, preparing for a fight.

"Relax," the tom rolled his amber eyes. "I'm Tree." Darkpaw froze, her fur flattening.

"*Tree*? But-bu-but *I* can't be the Clan Mediator," she mewled, sitting on her haunches worriedly. "I don't see ghosts!"

"No, you aren't Clan Mediator," Tree murmured. "You don't see ghosts... But you can see *me*."

"Why?"

"Think for a moment, apprentice," he mewed. "I, Tree, choose the Mediator for the clans, as I was the first. The Sisters have kin in each Clan, and any of those kin could be the next Mediator. Except Shadowclan. Frostpaw died moons ago. I'm sure you've heard of her, the young Mediator who died fighting a fox?" Darkpaw nodded slightly. "Good. So it isn't possible that *you* are the Mediator. Now, you want to know why you can see me, right?"

"Yeah,"

"It's very simple. As the first Mediator and a ghost, I can let *any cat* see me. And I can answer your questions, as I am also the Mediator for StarClan and GhostClan."

"*Ghost*Clan?" Darkpaw echoed. Tree nodded, his gaze solemn.

"Clan cats who have chosen to be ghosts in their afterlives." he explained. Darkpaw flattened her ears. *There's a Clan we don't know about?*

"Okay... So you're here to answer my questions?" she wondered aloud.

"No. I can do that, but StarClan doesn't want me to... You have to tell the Clans..." he paused.

"What?" Darkpaw leaned closer to him. "What do I have to tell the Clans? Tree?"

"You have to tell them that a young cat is going to the dark side," he murmured. "You have to stop this apprentice before they destroy the Clans."

Mwa ha ha ha ha! Nice cliffhanger, right? Please vote if you liked this chapter, or comment. If you ask a question, I'll always respond! Sorry that Chapter Ten was so short...

-Shadowstorm

Update

[image]

So this is an update... My first update I've ever made! Don't worry, I'll try not to put too many of these, because they aren't too interesting... I'll try to publish parts every other day, so that I can write longer chapters. Who do you think the apprentice is? Feel free to guess, as you won't know for a while. Do you have any suggestions for the book's name? I can't really think of one... I'm probably not going to put a cover until this is done, as it takes time and I should use that time to write chapters. Do you think this should be one, two or three books? I'm not going to out six like Erin Hunter, though. If you like this book, please vote it, comment, and continue to read! Thanks!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Eleven

[image]

"What do you mean? Which apprentice? Tell me!" Darkpaw pleaded. Tree simply shook his head and began to fade away. "Wait! You can't tell me only half the story!"

"Think, Darkpaw, think!" Tree yowled. Darkpaw sighed. He was gone. *I should find some prey,* she decided after a while. *Maybe the Dead Tree?... No. The border.* She headed off into the distance, her ears pricked. *Otter!* She thought worriedly. *I can't fight one of those! I guess I'll just head back to camp.* She turned around and ran as fast as her legs would carry her. *Faster!* She looked back and breathed deeply; the otter hadn't attacked her. *Wait! Is that... SkyClan scent?* She padded deeper into the forest, following the scent.

It only seems like a small patrol. I'll warn them off, she decided. "Stop!" she yowled, catching sight of tabby fur. "This is ShadowClan territory! Leave here *now*!"

"An apprentice thinks she can take us?" a grey tom snarled. He was short; surely he wasn't older than her?

"You're an apprentice, too!" Darkpaw spat. She shrunk back. The tabby pelt belonged to a lean warrior.

"Come on, Grassleap," the apprentice mewed. "Let's teach her a lesson. She can't go around threatning two *SkyClan* cats!" Grassleap narrowed his green eyes.

"You're right, Featherpaw," he hissed. Darkpaw snarled, her fur bristling. *Uh oh. A full-grown warrior with his apprentice? I'll surely lose...* She shoved her thoughts away as Grassleap's claws sunk into her side. Featherpaw attacked her from behind. *I haven't even fully recovered from the last battle!* She wailed in her head. She blinked rapidly and dodged another of Grassleap's attacks. Featherpaw bashed into her and she collapsed to the ground.

"ShadowClan filth!" Grassleap roared, leaping towards her and biting her belly. Darkpaw wreathed with pain, yowling. She finally struggled free, Featherpaw raking a claw across her ear.

"Mrro-o-o-w!" a new voice shrieked. *A battle cry? I'm doomed!* Darkpaw's eyes nearly burst out of her sockets as Orangepaw, Shadepaw and Treepool burst through the trees. Darkpaw stood up, panting, blood dripping from her.

"Darkpaw!" Shadepaw yowled. "You need-" he was cut off as Grassleap bit his tail.

"Stop! He's a medicine cat!" Darkpaw heaved to yell. "You can't-" Featherpaw snarled and pounced on her back, pinning her to the ground, jaws snapping. Darkpaw let out a shrill wail. "No! *StarClan* will punish you!" *As if they're not already angry at us,* Darkpaw thought. Featherpaw's weight was lifted off her back as Orangepaw sliced her claws at him.

"Shadepaw! Get Darkpaw out of here!" she meowed in panic. "Quickly!" Shadepaw had gotten up; Darkpaw was relieved to see that his injury was shallow and misaimed. He began to drag Darkpaw through the woods.

"Wait here," he ordered as they came to the Dead Tree. "I need to get some herbs for you, so that you can get back to camp." Darkpaw nodded limply.

"Okay," she choked out. He came back with a herb in his jaws and applied it to her wounds.

"We need to get you to the medicine den," he mewed, beginning to slowly drag her towards camp. As he staggered into the den, Tallmeadow yowled, "Shadepaw! What- I asked you to get poppy seeds! Why did you take so lon- Darkpaw!" Shadepaw said nothing, laying his littermate on some moss.

"I gave her wounds marigold," he explained. "I can do the comfrey root. Her wounds are bad. Two SkyClan cats attacked her." Tallmeadow's eyes flashed darkly.

"Those fox-hearts," she growled. "Can you give me some nettles and poppy seeds? Thank you." Darkpaw closed her eyes tiredly. "Sleep, Darkpaw," Tallmeadow's gentle voice directed. "Your body needs some rest." Darkpaw nodded. She was already drifting off. The world was so far away...

...

"Darkpaw, wake up," Shadepaw murmured. "Fernstar is calling us." Darkpaw began to get up and Shadepaw gently pushed her down. "No, you can't walk yet. Just listen; you can see from here, yes?" Darkpaw nodded slightly. "Okay. Good." He walked into the clearing. Darkpaw watched as Fernstar began.

"Tonight is the half-moon," she mewed. "And there is lots to discuss within ShadowClan, too. First," she paused, "it is true. SkyClan attacked Darkpaw, in *our* territory, and gave her severe wounds. Luckily, Orangepaw and Treepool came in time to save her." *What about Shadepaw?* Darkpaw thought. "Second of all, we need to know if Shadepaw is ready to be-" Fernstar let out a long, slow cough and leaped down from the branch. "If Shadepaw is ready to become a medicine ca-" She let out another bout of coughing. "Cat-Tallmeadow? Be quick."

"He is," Tallmeadow mewed. Fernstar's eyes went wide with shock. "When Darkpaw was hurt, he gave her herbs and didn't sleep for the whole night, taking care of her. Other than that, he has shown great knowledge of herbs." Fernstar gave Shadepaw a steel glare.

"Well then," she coughed again.

"You need herbs! You have greencough!" Tallmeadow shouted. Darkpaw froze. When had Fernstar's whitecough grown deadly?

"Nonsense! Let me finish!" Fernstar ordered.

"But I-"

"*Be quiet*! Shadepaw will become a medicine here and now, in front of everyone else, and I will announce his name." She doubled over, her eyes glazing over.

"Fernstar! You need medical treatment, and his mentor must perform the cerem-"

"No, I don't! And I will perform the ceremony!"

"Mousedung!" the medicine cat yowled. "It is my duty to-"

"*Right now*," Fernstar added. "So Shadepaw is ready to be a medicine cat... The Dark Forest blesses him as one." *No! How dare you!* Darkpaw thought treacherously. "He will from now on be known as-" Fernstar fell to the ground, her sides heaving, and she rasped, "Shadeflight!"

What do you think? Will Shadeflight keep his name? Will Fernstar die? What will happen next? What does the prophecy mean? (This is just to keep you on a cliffhanger...)

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twelve

[image]

We have to find a way to change Shadeflight's name, we have to figure out what the prophecy means, and we have to find the apprentice, Darkpaw was going over what needed to be done, as she was stuck in the medicine den. Her gaze flicked to Fernstar, who was barely breathing on the ground beside her. Shadeflight and Tallmeadow were muttering what they could do- not that Darkpaw could understand their medicine cat talk. *Wait a minute...* "Who's the deputy now?"

"Treepool. It was announced when you were asleep." Tallmeadow sighed. "There's so few of us left. You and Orangepaw *must* be queens, or it will be the end of ShadowClan." Darkpaw blinked.

"Sure, when I'm a warrior. Speaking of that, do you know when Orangepaw's assessment is? Or who her mentor is?" Shadeflight answered this time, not lifting his head from Fernstar. Tallmeadow padded out of the den, murmuring about getting cobwebs.

"Yowltail is her mentor, and her assessment will be in two moons. Yours will be in four." *Yours. It's not* ours *anymore. It's so different.* She sat up, surprised that her muscles didn't ache.

"When can I get back on my feet?" She stared wistfully out of the den.

"A half-moon, probably," her littermate answered. "Fernstar?" Tallmeadow froze. Darkpaw copied her, fur bristling. "Fernstar!" Her eyes were closed, and her flanks barely rising. She stiffened, glancing at Darkstorm and Shadeflight with her brilliant green gaze.

"I know," she whispered, her eyes beautiful, finally staring att them with *understanding*. "I always loved Thinfur... But he never loved... me. Tell him... tell him I forgive him," she managed, her mew clear instead of raspy. "I sense StarClan around me... It's my time. But now," her muscles slowly loosened. "Now, I can think again. I was

never meant for Thinfur. Tell him that I get it now. Rabbitear was better than me. More than just a mousetail better. She was more important than the Clans to him... Because he loved her. I understand now. He never felt that way for me.

"You are destined for great things. Promise me- promise me..." She shivered, her scent weakening. "Promise me that you'll get to the end. You'll save the Clans..."

"I promise," Darkpaw mewed, nudging the ShadowClan leader.

"Me, too," Shadeflight whispered. "Don't die; ShadowClan needs you-"

"ShadowClan never, and *will* never, need me," Fernstar closed her eyes. "You will save the Clans. You..." She let out a long, rattly breath, and went limp on the moss.

"Tallmeadow," Shadeflight whispered hoarsely, his voice rising in panic."Tallemadow! It's Fernstar!" Tallmeadow rushed into the den, cobwebs in her mouth. "She's..." He shivered. "She's dead..."

"Treepool!" Tallmeadow yowled. "Fernstar is dead." Treepool looked much sadder than Shadeflight, Tallmeadow and Darkpaw, who were only scared for the clan. *Ever since I've known her, Fernstar has been...* Was... *Kinda crazy. But I guess she must've used to be better, if she was once appointed deputy.* Darkpaw sighed.

"Treestar," she mewed blankly. "I guess you'll have to recieve your ni- Wait! You can change Shadeflight's name!" Shadeflight blinked at her in horror.

"No! Maybe an evil cat once had my name, but I *like* it. It will help the others remember Fernstar." Tallmeadow heaved herself up.

"Treepool. I'll go with you to the Moonpool, but Shadeflight will stay here to take care of Darkpaw."

"Okay. I'll announce the news to the clan." He ran out and supposedly leaped onto the Pinebranch. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather at the Pinebranch!" The summoned ShadowClan started murmuring, flummoxed. "Fernstar died during

the night." The clan's mews rose in horror. Darkpaw curled up into a ball. *I have to stop pretending I have a normal life. I have a hard one. But I can't let that stop me; I need to solve the prophecy.*

...

Darkpaw shook her pelt as Treestar summoned the clan. "As you all know, we have gotten rid of that otter," he began. "I lost one of my lives, but luckily no one else died. StarClan sent me back here, but they sent me no warning or advice; they didn't speak to me at all. If anyone knows something we can do, please say it." *The prophecy! The prophecy!* "Well, then. The meeting is over. Orangepaw, your assessment will be in a moon. Yowltail, have you ordered the patrols for the day?" As the deputy nodded, Orangepaw grinned excitedly, and Darkpaw smiled.

"You deserve it!" *We've gotten no closer to solving the prophecy, but for the past moon that's all I've thought about. StarClan, please help us!* She padded into the apprentice's den. Orangepaw was practicing her fighting skills, so she was alone to think. *Beware the lake and beware the moon, for despair is coming. Only shadows can save you now. Destruction is coming. The lake will die. But what could that* mean? She paced around in a circle. *Why would we beware the lake and moon? Who are the shadows? And how could the lake* die?

The shadows could *be ShadowClan, but we're so weak... We're in no state to save the clans. Maybe just one of us.* She paused. *Yes. Maybe two or three. But it's probably ShadowClan. I think that's all I can guess for now, so what about the apprentice who could destroy us?*

"There are so many," she mewed aloud. *StarClan... Please send a sign...*

"Darkpaw?" Shadeflight cut in. "What are you..."

"The prophecy. What could it *mean*?" Darkpaw wailed. "And which cat is dangerous for us all?" Shadeflight looked at her.

"Don't go crazy thinking about the prophecy. In time, it will reveal itself. But I think we should focus on which apprentice is the danger- you were given a clue. Work with that clue." Darkpaw

nodded, understanding.

"Okay. By next moon, I want to figure this out. I don't want my life being wasted. If I can't find the apprentice by then, I'm ignoring what Tree said."

So Shadepaw is permanently Shade*flight*, and Darkpaw is going to give up soon. Orangepaw's assessment is a moon. Things are changing... But for good or for worse?

Chapter Thirteen

[image]

"Arrowpaw!" Darkpaw cried, walking towards the broad-shouldered tom. "How are you? Did anything with that red warrior happen?"

"Yes..." he mumbled. "We shouldn't talk to each other. We're from different clans." *What? But...*

"It's a gathering!" Darkpaw protested, saying the first thing that entered her mind. *Where is he going with this?* "Of cou-"

"Coralstar told me that I've grown too attached to you," he explained wearily. Darkpaw drew in a gasp. "We can't talk anymore, not where others can see us." He lowered his voice. "But we can where other's *won't* see us." Darkpaw's heart skipped a beat.

"What do y-"

"The border you have with RiverClan. We can meet there every quarter-moon." Darkpaw nodded slowly, excitement flooding through her body.

"Okay. I'll see you there." Arrowpaw padded away to a group of RiverClan cats. *Yes! I'll be there, Arrowpaw, don't worry!*

"Orangepaw!" Darkpaw yowled, rushing over to her. "Who's this?" Orangepaw was talking to a white warrior.

"This is Comfreytail, from WindClan." Orangepaw answered.

"Hey," Comfreytail murmured cheerfully. "You're Darkpaw, right?" Darkpaw nodded self-consciously. "Oh. I like your name. The leaders are starting!"

"SkyClan welcomes Featherpaw as a warrior. He is now Featherheart." The ShadowClan cats remained silent as the other clans cheered. *He's the least deserving cat of a warrior name,* Darkpaw thought scornfully. *Hmmph.* "We have lost an elder, Cliffclaw."

Treestar raised his muzzle.

"ShadowClan has a new elder, Badgerleap. And," he paused, "Fernstar died." Darkpaw wasn't too surprised at the silence and few sad murmurs. "I am now Treestar. Shadeflight is a new medicine cat of ours."

"*Shadeflight*?" several cats spat. Darkpaw winced. *Please just let it go! Shadeflight couldn't control his name, Fernstar gave it to him! Not Tallmeadow!*

"He's evil!" Darkpaw caught Shadeflight's injured gaze.

"Shadeflight is dead!"

"He's *back*?!"

"No. Our new medicine cat shares his name. Fernstar chose it. And our deputy is Yowltail." He looked to Coralstar.

"RiverClan has a new kit, Ripplekkit. The red warrior was a cat from StarClan that talked to Arrowpaw. And Half Moon was an ancient cat, correct?" Treestar nodded.

"Yes, that's right. We'll tell you if she comes again." *Should we be telling everyone everything we know? ShadowClan is weak; if we accidentally reveal a weakness, we won't be able to defend ourselves. Treestar, please, be careful!*

"We spotted a fox in our territory, but we chased it off. Though it may have gone onto SkyClan territory- we chased it off on the border." Strikestar sighed. "Lightningpaw has been injured, but is fine now."

"WindClan is well. We found a weasel, but chased it away. An apprentice was severely injured." Quickstar mewed. Tallmeadow caterwauled.

"We must do something about StarClan!" she yowled loudly, baring her teeth in challenge. "Snarlfang is right; they're against us! And Shadeflight has news!" Shadeflight drew himself up.

"I do. It's a prophecy." The cats drew in their breaths. *Should we really tell them? Shadeflight, please be doing the right thing...* "*Only shadows can save you now. Destruction is coming. The lake will die.*" Shadeflight paused. "And Tree payed Darkpaw a visit." *That's too much information! Stop it!* She flicked her tail, trying to get his attention but failing. "He said that there is an apprentice that could destroy the clans. We must find this apprentice..." Shadeflight's eyes darkened. "And..." He hesitated, a shiver running down his spine. "And kill them."

Well, that was unlike Shadeflight, wasn't it? Who do you think the apprentice is? Darkpaw will focus more on the prophecy and what Tree said now, so please keep reading! I'm sorry about the shortness of this chapter, but I thought that this was a good ending for it.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Fourteen

[image]

Darkpaw rolled her eyes at Orangepaw. "You'll do *fine*,"

"But will I really? Orangepaw fretted. Darkpaw nodded.

"Don't worry." Orangepaw sighed and sat down. The apprentice's den was cozy and smelled of mice. "Oh... Grassfang wants me to check Badgerleap for ticks. I'll see you later!" She padded into the medicine den. "Can I have mouse bile, for ticks?" Shadeflight nosed some towards her. She pulled away at the stench, squeezed her eyes shut, and grasped it in her jaws. She ran into the elder's den.

"Darkpaw? Is that you?" Badgerleap asked.

"Yeah." She began to check the old cat for ticks and fleas, biting a fat one near her ear. "How are you?"

"Good." Badgerleap closed her eyes. "ShadowClan needs more young ones."

"Yeah. Everyone's been telling me to get a mate when I'm a warrior."

"But who? All the toms will have had mates, and maybe some will just not want one. And my hope was Orangepaw and Shadeflight, but now that's not a possibility... Maybe the prophecy meant that ShadowClan will find more young toms? Right now, what we need is an outsider. An outsider to be taken into the clan. Your assessment is in two moons, yes?" Darkpaw nodded.

"You don't have anymore ticks. I'd better go train with Orangepaw. She *really* needs support- her warrior name should be Orangefright." Badgerleap smiled.

"I'll have to pay my kit a visit. But what worries me..." Darkpaw looked up at Badgerleap. "What really worries me is that

ShadowClan will completely be gone." Darkpaw froze. She hadn't thought of that. "Do you have any toms in mind? Even outside ShadowClan?" Darkpaw's thoughts raced to a tom, identical to Shadeflight... As if it was a sign that they were meant to be together...

"No," she lied.

"Oh, there's someone." Badgerleap flashed her a mischievous grin. "Anyways, you'd better get going. I'll see you later."

...

Is Arrowpaw going to come? Darkpaw wondered. She looked at the night sky. He was late. *He has to come.* The ferns rustled. "Darkpaw?" a voice asked. She purred.

"I'm here." She looked at him. "My assessment will be in two moons."

"Mine will be in two *moon rises*," he bragged. "So soon. Huh. I wonder what my warrior name will be. And yours, too." Darkpaw shivered.

"Isn't it cold?" she asked. Arrowpaw shrugged.

"Not really." He closed his eyes. "I should go back."

"It's only been heartbeats."

"The longest heartbeats of my life," Arrowpaw mewed. He sighed. "But really, Coralstar has suspicions." Darkpaw blinked.

"Okay. I'll see you..."

"In a quarter-moon?" She nodded. "Okay." She watched as he ran off and looked in the direction of the ShadowClan camp.

...

Darkpaw closed her eyes. "So the apprentice could be anyone," she mewed. "Great job, us! We really narrowed it down!" Shadeflight

snorted.

"Yeah, so great. Anyways, really, who could it *not* be?"

"I guess me... And not you. And not Orangepaw; we're almost always together."

"The keyword is *almost*," Shadeflight mewed. "We have to include her. And me. Beside Tree and Half Moon, you don't meet cats from StarClan, or at least *supposedly* StarClan. Maybe the Dark Forest is tricking me."

"There are so many options!" Darkpaw groaned. "It could be anyone! I guess not me, though."

"What about Arrowpaw?" Shadeflight suggested. "He seems like the obvious choice; he's strong and smart, and if someone succeeds to trick him, he's a valuable piece on their side. And plus, what about that ginger warrior he mentioned?"

"He's not!" Darkpaw spat. "The ginger warrior could be *Firestar* for all we know! The legendary Firestar! Just because Arrowpaw's from a rival clan doesn't me-" she abruptly shut her mouth. "Never mind." She looked to Orangepaw, happy for a distraction. "Hey, Orangepaw!" she yowled. "When, exactly, is your assessment?"

"A quarter-moon!" Orangepaw shivered visibly. "I'm going to go to sleep. It's late." Darkpaw remembered suddenly. *I have to meet with Arrowpaw! But just for a heartbeat... It's better than nothing.* As ShadowClan fell asleep, Darkpaw slipped out of the camp. *Wait for me! I know I'm late!*

"Arrowpaw!" she called. An answering yowl filled her ears. "Did you pass the assessment?" Darkpaw asked eagerly.

"Of course!" he puffed out his chest proudly. "I'm called- wait, guess!"

"Uh... I don't know! Arrowflight? Arrowfall? Arrowfern?"

"I'm Arrow*heart* now," he boasted. "And what do you want *your* warrior name to be?" Darkpaw shrugged.

"I don't care, not really. I can't believe you're a warrior already." Arrowhearrt lowered his head, his eyes darting to the ground.

"I know," he mumbled. "There's so much responsibility all of a sudden." He sighed. "When should we meet again?"

"The gathering. That's when the half-moon will be, and Orangepaw's ceremony will be in a quarter-moon. I'm sure she'll pass."

"Okay. I'll see you then." Darkpaw nodded and turned to the forest, walking through it to her camp. She quietly padded to the apprentice's den and collapsed. She was tired. She closed her eyes and dreamed of grey-furred toms from RiverClan.

Darkpaw looked eagerly at Treestar and Yowltail. The ShadowClan cats had been gathered. "Did she pass?" she yowled. Orangepaw paced around in circles.

"Did I?"

"Yes." Yowltail answered. Orangepaw jumped up.

"Really? I did! I did!"

"Orangepaw, come here," Treestar ordered. Orangepaw ran and leaped in between Yowltail and Treestar. "I, Treestar of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn.

"Orangepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your territory, even at the cost of your life?" Darkpaw let out a breath as Orangepaw answered determinedly.

"I do."

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Orangepaw, from this day on you will be known as Orangetail. StarClan honors your determination and agility, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ShadowClan." Treestar rested his muzzle on Orangetail's head, and she licked his shoulder.

"Orangetail! Orangetail! Orangetail!" the cats yowled in celebration. Darkpaw could hear Badgerleap's proud caterwaul over the rest of the voices. Orangetail leaped down gracefully and nuzzled her mother's cheek. The two she-cats were identical, now that Orangetail had grown, and Darkpaw could hardly make out one from the other. But she could see that they were both happy. So was she- and so was every cat in all of ShadowClan. *This just goes to show,* Darkpaw thought, *that even with the hardships, life by the lake is the best it could be. And it will never change.*

Chapter Fifteen

[image]

Darkpaw sighed miserably. They were no closer to finding the apprentice, and she hadn't been chosen to go to the gathering. She didn't know when she would see Arrowheart, and if he would be at the next one. "I think it would be someone we know," she decided to herself. "Otherwise, it would be too vague a clue. But it could be Orangetail, still, and, I guess, Arrowheart. So now it isn't just apprentices." She lowered her head.

I need help. But Shadeflight is at the gathering, and I don't want to talk about it with Tallmeadow. She sighed again. "So which apprentices do I *know*?" *Including Arrowheart and Orangetail,* she added silently. *I guess... Shadeflight. But that's... No. Especially with all this, he would be careful. But technically I* have *met Bushpaw and Slatepaw.* She shook herself. "So I guess I won't give up." *Not Bushpaw. He was outwardly friendly, but Slatepaw...* She licked her paw, which she had impaled on a thorn a few sun-highs ago. *But I shouldn't take any chances. The choices are Shadeflight, Orangetail, Bushpaw, Slatepaw and Arrowheart.* She looked up at the sky, exiting the den. *They'll come back soon.* She took a piece of fresh-kill and sunk her teeth into it, savoring the taste.

"Huh. So five cats." She finished her scrawny toad. "But I think I can put that aside for now. I want to know how the lake could *die*. I guess flooding and it drying up?" She looked up at the sound of cats. "Anything ha-" Her eyes widened. Treestar was carrying a limp body in his teeth.

"Tallmeadow is dead!"

"What?"

"And so are some other cats," Shadeflight put in. He looked devastated. "It wasn't her time! She wasn't that old; she had moons left!" Orangetail was shaking.

"How?" Grassfang demanded. Yowltail lowered her eyes in sadness.

"The tree to the island was rotten. It broke as we were coming back. And RiverClan had reported that the fish were all gone. Could this have to do with the lake dying?" Shadeflight was dragging Tallmeadow's body onto a pile of moss he had quickly taken from his den.

"Maybe," he admitted, lowering Tallmeadow. "But we have to do a ceremony. We must honor her spirit." He bent his head to share tongues with his former mentor one last time. Darkpaw bent her head to join him, followed by Treestar, who had been littermates with Tallmeadow.

...

Darkpaw felt excitement course through her. Ever since Tallmeadow's death, she and Shadeflight had focused even more on which apprentice it could be, paying a visit to Bushpaw and Slatepaw. They had decided against Bushpaw being the apprentice, but they weren't sure about Slatepaw. But now, Darkpaw was taking her warrior assessment, and she had erased everything else from her mind. She knew her mentor, Grassfang, was watching her from somewhere as she prowled through the forest. Her ears pricked, she sniffed the air. *Is that the scent of vole?* she wondered. The prey had become so scarce that most patrols returned with a single toad, and she would leap at the chance of vole.

Spotting the brown creature, she stalked forward, her haunches light and her scent drifting away. She bared her fangs, preparing to leap, when a loud monster let out a roar. She jumped, and the noises scared her prey. She scowled and raced after it, knowing she wouldn't catch it. Her eyes lost sight of it. "Fox dung!" she swore.

This time even more careful, she spotted the vole again, and lightly walked towards it. Unaware, it continued to nibble at the grass. She pounced and her teeth met the warm body. She smiled to herself. Although it was skinny, the vole was prey, and that was what counted. She continued to look for prey, unsuccessful, and returned to the camp. "You caught something!" Orangetail exclaimed.

"Yep. I hope it's enough..." Grassfang appeared behind her.

"That was great!" he praised. "You're a natural hunter!" *I wish Thinfur was here to see my ceremony. He'd be so proud.* She sent a silent prayer to her father, hoping he would return soon.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather at the Pinebranch for a clan meeting!" Treestar yowled. He glanced at Grassfnag, who nodded slightly. *Does that mean I passed, with only one piece of prey?* Darkpaw wondered. She looked up at Treestar, and Shadeflight nidged her.

"Finally! We'll both have our full names!" he murmured. Darkpaw smiled at her littermate's support.

"We gather today in honor of an apprentice. I, Treestar of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn.

"Darkpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your territory, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," Darkpaw answered nervously, lifting her head to meet her leader's friendly gaze. She knew what she was promising. That she would be a true warrior of ShadowClan.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Darkpaw, from this day on you will be known as Darkstorm. StarClan honors your perseverance and bravery, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ShadowClan." Darkstorm licked Treestar's shoulder.

"Darkstorm! Darkstorm! Darkstorm!" Darkstorm shyly leaped down to the ground and closed her eyes, letting the praise wrap around her, brushing all her worries away. As she opened them, she gasped.

Thinfur! She glanced at the Clan, who had met with where she was staring. Thinfur, bleeding with a scratched eye and a scratch on his throat, was leaning against a tree. He stared back.

"Help," he croaked weakly. "I need your help..."

Chapter Sixteen

[image]

Darkstorm rushed to Thinfur on speedy paws. Her thoughts coursed through her brain. *Why did you go? Why did you come back?* "What happened?" she ended up blurting. Thinfur winced as he answered.

"I need your help..." *Yes, we get that! What* happened*?*

"You do," Shadeflight replied, grabbing Thinfur by the scruff. Orangetail rushed over to help him. The rest of the clan just sat there, watching in confusion.

"ShadowClan!" Treestar's gaze swept through the cats. "Do not go. I feel that there is news *within* the Clan that we do not know about." Darkstorm swallowed. *Does he know? But... Arrowheart hasn't seen me for a moon!* She stood firmly on the ground. Treestar didn't know. And if he did, he wasn't mad. She had just become a warrior! "Orangetail," he snapped. *What? Has* Orangetail *done something? Really?* "You have broken the Warrior Code. Do you have anything to say for yourself?" Orangetail glared back at him.

"The warrior code is *stupid*," she spat. "Or at least, it is *right now*. I think we should change it. What's the harm in loving? What's the harm for a medicine cat to have kits? Why do we need gatherings if the Clans will attack anyway?" Darkstorm stifled a gasp.

"You can't love a cat from other Clans. Otherwise, you won't be loyal."

"But *why*-"

"It's too tempting for a medicine cat to treat their kits before heavily injured warriors. And we need gatherings because we also need a time to show we are not savages, and to praise warriors for becoming warriors and kits for apprentices. But *you* have not followed the Warrior Code. Why don't you tell everyone what you've done?" Treestar responded. Orangetail scowled.

"Why don't I?" Unwavering, the ginger warrior continued. "I love a cat from another clan. A *medicine cat*. And he loves me. So if you want me to leave ShadowClan, I will, but do you want to, really? I'm still a loyal ShadowClan cat; I *can* still be loyal, and you know I'm a valuable warrior." Her gaze softened as she met Darkstorm's. *I will fight for you, my friend,* Darkstorm thought. And Orangetail understood. "And I have friends here."

"*Which* medicine cat?" Treestar snapped. Orangetail shrunk back.

"Snarlfang," she lowered her voice. "From ThunderClan."

"Was that all a show? That StarClan is mad at us?" Treestar demanded.

"No."

"So he disobeyed StarClan, did he?" Darkstorm sprang up.

"No! *I* bet that he thinks, like Orangetail, that we should change the Code! Maybe *that* is why StarClan is angry!" Treestar snarled.

"And are you a *loyal* ShadowClan warrior? Did I make a mistake in choosing you to be a warrior?" This time, Grassfang pushed forward.

"No. My apprentice is loyal." He shot Darkstorm a knowing glance. *He knows,* she realized with a growing horror. *But he still trusts me.*

"Orangetail. You can stay- for now. And Darkstorm, be careful. Same with you, Grassfang." *Does he know, too?* Darkstorm wondered, looking up at Treestar. Orangetail raised her chin as she stalked towards the warrior's den. *That was such a great after-ceremony,* Darkstorm thought bitterly. "You can go now," Treestar yowled. ShadowClan began to move away. Badgerfang was looking at where Orangetail had been sitting with pure disgust in her eyes. Darkstorm sighed and ran to the medicine den.

"I heard," Shadeflight murmured. "I think..." he trailed off before regaining his voice. "I think Orangetail is right. Not about the gatherings, though. That was... a stretch." Thinfir weakly rolled his head.

"Are you a warrior?" he mewed.

"I'm Darkstorm now," the black she-cat answered proudly.

"And I'm Shadeflight. Don't worry about the name," he added. Thinfur smiled.

"The kits are all grown up, do you hear that, my love?" he sighed distantly. "Our little Darkkit and Shadekit." Darkstorm and Shadeflight exchanged a glance.

"Who is our mother?" Shadeflight murmured. Thinfur blinked.

"Don't you know? Rabbitear," he muttered. "Oh, Rabbitear... We have to save her! We have to save Onyx, too... But she's dead, he killed her, she's dead..." *Is he crazy?* Darkstorm wondered. *Yeah. I wonder who our mother* really *is.*

"I'm going to go and check on Orangetai-" Shadeflight nudged Darkstorm.

"Come with me. You and Orangetail. Thinfur just needs to rest for a while; he'll be alright by himself." Darkstorm nodded, confused, and found Orangetail.

"Come," she murmured. The orange-eyed cat followed Darkstorm and Shadeflight to the Dead Tree. "Shadeflight wants us," she explained.

"Well, we know *you* aren't the apprentice," Shadeflight mewed. "At the Moonpool, the recent one, Jay Wing told me so." Orangetail snorted.

"You thought *I* was the apprentice?" Darkstorm chuckled at Orangetail's expression.

"It does seem mouse-brained. But we couldn't take any risk. So now it's either Slatepaw..."

"Me," Shadeflight added, "and Arrowheart." He blinked. "Orangetail. Do you really think we should change the Code?"

"Yeah," Orangetail muttered. "Not take it away completely," she clarified, alarmed, "but change it." Shadeflight closed his eyes.

"I agree. And I know you do, Darkstorm, even if you won't admit it." He opened them and continued, "we medicine cats all agree. *All* of us. But the leaders?" he sighed. Orangetail nodded cheekily, but understandlingly.

"So how's it going with Arrowheart?" she asked. Darkstorm jumped.

"You *know*? I thought- I *hoped* only Grassfang, I think he knows," she admitted. "Who else?"

"You aren't exactly great at keeping secrets," Shadeflight mewed. "But that... isn't what I wanted to talk about. Orangetail, I want to ask Slatepaw some things. Before, Darkstorm and I spoke to Bushpaw, pretending to have medicine cat business with Snarlfang- who didn't even know that we were there-" she faltered, "but I can't go to ThunderClan with Darkstorm again, as it would be too suspicious. So could you go with me?" Orangetail nodded.

"Sure. But... what if it isn't Slatepaw?" Orangetail murmured, glancing at Darkstorm. "Also, how did you check on *every single apprentice* in *each Clan*?!"

"We didn't," Darkstorm explained. "We figured that it would be a useless clue if we didn't know, or at least have met, the apprentice."

"Oh. I can see that. So when do we go?"

"How about now?" Darkstorm butted in. "Because later you'll have to check on Thinfur again, Shadeflight, and Orangetail won't have any duties... at least for now." Shadeflight nodded.

"Then let's go. And Darkstorm?" She looked at her littermate. "I have a feeling you should check on Arrowheart. I don't know when you're supposed to see each other, but go to the RiverClan camp and make an excuse."

"Okay," she agreed, speeding through the forest toward the border with RiverClan. Her skinniness helped, even though she was hungry, to get there quickly. She stopped when she found a scent-

mark and waited for a patrol.

"Hey!" a silver tom snapped. "Who are you? Do you think you're going to steal RiverClan territory?" Startled, Darkstorm lurched back.

"No, no! I need to see your medicine cat," she blurted. A tortoiseshell she-cat appeared beside her.

"Why?"

"Er... Shadeflight sent me," she blurted. "It's medicine cat stuff, something about a dream?" The tortoiseshell she-cat nodded.

"Come. You'd better not try anything," she added. *I'm not going to attack your medicine cat!* Darkstorm protested in her head. Her eyes widened as she was taken to a den. It was made of reeds and mud. "Get in there and talk to Finspot. You don't have a lotta time. We need our medicine cat." She glared at him, perched outside the den.

"Hello?" she mewed nervously. A grey tom greeted her. "I have a message from Shadeflight. About the Code," she added, lowering her voice.

"And?" the medicine cat asked.

"I need to talk to Arrowheart," she blurted. "Er... He told me that I had to... give him a message, personally, yes." *Please please please...*

"You yung un's. He's here. He got hurt." Darkstorm's eyes widened. *Right here? Uh oh.* She glanced at Finspot. "I don't care about lovey-doveys. Ya wanna talk, you can talk. I'm not repeatin' whatever you say to Coralstar. Shadeflight must've told you that I don't care about cross-clan business." *Oh. Good.* Darkstorm spotted a shape in the corner of the den, on a bed of moss.

"Arrowheart," she whispered, deciding to trust Finspot. "Arrowheart!" He rolled over.

"Hey, Darkpaw. You come to me in the middle of the camp now? Wait, *are* you Darkpaw anymore?"

"I'm Darkstorm," she explained. "But Shadeflight told me he had a feeling that you were in trouble, and that I should check on you." Arrowheart smiled smugly.

"It was only a small flood," he mewed. "There was just a kit that I helped, one that didn't swim."

"And you banged yourself against some underwater log," Finspot snapped. "Be careful when you're swimming."

"Eh. Whatever. But I'm okay." Darkstorm looked at Finspot and lowered her voice.

"Next quarter-moon, same place, same time." Arrowheart nodded. "Did that red warrior visit you?"

"Oh yeah. She's here now," he added. Darkstorm jumped. "She trains me. A lot. Everyday." He snorted. "You should probably go. I'm surprised Coralstar hasn't barged in here already."

Darkstorm pressed her nose to his forehead.

"Next quarter-moon," she agreed. "I'll see you then." As she walked out of the den, she stole a longing glance at the tom. But then another cat padded into the den, and she had to leave, and the time she had with Arrowheart ended all too soon.

So I tried to include Arrowheart in this chapter. Hmm. Did Orangetail surprise you? What do you think will happen? I'll probably change the cover to something better- don't worry. Thank you all for reading this! These views make my day, and I can't believe that there are 219 of them!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Seventeen

[image]

"Maybe that other clue- remember it? 'Follow the brightest star'." Darkstorm guessed. "I mean, if we don't know who the apprentice is-"

"We don't," Orangetail mewed. "Slatepaw revealed nothing, and you say you didn't really talk to Arrowheart about it." Darkstorm edged away.

"Well, either way, we aren't even sure that we know the apprentice. So I think we should think about the prophecy itself. How will the lake die?" Shadeflight asked. Orangetail shrugged.

"I dunno." Orangetail jumped, flicking her ears worriedly. "Twolegs! Run!" The three cats scattered in different directions, watching as a group of Twolegs walked into the clearing, followed by a monster.

"What are they doing?" Darkstorm whispered. "They already came and marked a bunch of trees with the shiny stuff last half-moon," she recalled. "Why are they back?"

"Who knows?" Shadeflight shrugged. "Twolegs are weird. Hey, what's-" A rumble interrupted him as the Twolegs hoisted something skinny and long on a large pine, attaching it to the monster. *Why doesn't the monster eat them?* Darkstorm wondered. *Huh.* A lighter Twoleg yowled something, and another took out a loud, buzzing thing and began to smack it on the tree.

"What..." Orangetail mewed in horror as the tree began to waver. "They're killing it! They're killing the forest, just like they did in the old territories! I remember the legends!" She widened her eyes.

"Run!" Darkstorm shouted, and they took off. "We have to warn ShadowClan!" Orangetail's gaze flicked back to Shadeflight. *He's not trained for speed,* Darkstorm realized, dashing back to grab him by the scruff and help him. Something made a loud thud, and

Orangetail let out a yowl.

"The tree!" Darkstorm managed to catch a glimpse of the tree, fallen on the ground, with Shadeflight's fur in the way.

"I'm not a kit!" her littermate spat. "Let me go!" Darkstorm ignored him and continued to run. Orangetail skidded to a stop as they came to the ShadowClan camp, and the clan looked up to see what the rush was.

"Treestar! The Twolegs are killing the forest, like in the old territories!" Shadeflight howled, ripping free of Darkstorm's grip. "They aren't far from here! We need to go somewhere else!" Treestar's fur spiked.

"How near?" he demanded.

"Closer than the Dead Tree," Orangetail yowled. "We have to move deeper into the territory!"

"Mousedung!" Treestar snarled. "The gathering is soon. We'll discuss it then."

"But how will we even get to the island?" Badgerleap inquired. "The tree is broken. Could it be that StarClan really is mad at us?" Treestar closed his eyes wearily as Yowltail answered.

"I don't know. But we have to find a way. We have two sunrises to do so." Her eyes narrowed. "But we must move, Treestar." The tom looked old as he sighed.

"All those moons ago, the ancient clan left the lake to the mountains. Then the mountain cats to the forest, and the forest cats back to the lake. Are you saying we should leave?" Darkstorm flicked her tail. *No. I think I know what the prophecy means now.* She looked at ShadowClan. *We need a leader,* she realized. *One that everyone is proud of. Fernstar wasn't that leader, and Treestar isn't, either.* She lifted her head, feeling the warm sun beat down on her. *Who will be that leader?* She began to speak.

"Maybe we should. The lake has given many cats good, long lives, and maybe there is a better place out there." Darkstorm caught sight

of the mountains through the trees. "Look out there. Maybe we're meant to lead the other clans to a better place. Maybe *that's* how we can save us all. Maybe we *are* the shadows in the prophecy." *Come on. Trust me. This must be what the prophecy means! I'm still not sure about the other stuff, but this is how ShadowClan will save everyone.* Grassfang blinked, and Thinfur, watching from the medicine den, let out a mew.

"Just then, my kit," he began, sounding like his old self again, "you acted like a leader."

Sorry about the shortness of the chapter...

Update

Thank you all so much for 262 reads! I'm so happy that my fanfiction has caught the eye of you and everyone else who reads this. I can't believe that people really read this, and that some people enjoy it. I'm seriously crying.

Please comment your thoughts. I don't mind! I'm always glad to make this story better. I know I've already said this, but I must say it again. Thank you all for 262 reads!

The chapters aren't too big, but that means I can update more often... And just *one* last time. Thanks for reading this, all of you. I'm over myself with excitement that even a *single person* has read this! ...And that was a sorta long update that was barely related to the book, but still!... Going on.

What do you think of everything? Darkstorm's name? The prophecy? Literally all the cats and their personalities? I need to know what my readers think. :) Do you like how things are going? Thanks for reading up to this, and please keep reading.

Now, the update about the updates. I'll try to publish a chapter every other day, but it might turn onto once every three days, as I am surprisingly busy, even during the summer. The updates like this will be more or less every ten chapters.

Ha! I've looked over this and edited it at least seven times- and each time, I see more views! Thank you so, so much for these views, and I'm so happy for the votes and comments!... And *again*, I say this... But it's true!

Do you have any suggestions for the title or an image for the

cover? It's pretty much the hardest thing to decide, which is weird, since I'm also writing the chapters. Before this, I thought that the titles were the easy parts of the books!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Eighteen

[image]

Darkstorm's fur prickled self-consciously as Thinfur finished. "I..." she mumbled. *I know when I was a kit I* wanted *to be leader, but now...* She glanced up at the sky. *But now, I don't think I can handle it. I already have to deal with a prophecy.*

"You may all go," Treestar mewed in a tone that allowed none to object. Darkstorm looked to him. Rage fired in his eyes. *And I've just made an enemy.* "Wait. I don't suppose any of you know a way to get to the gathering island?" As nobody spoke, he sighed. "I'll contact the other leaders and see what will happen. I'll go to WindClan. Shadeflight, you go to SkyClan with Yowltail. You may need protection. Grassfang, you'll go to RiverClan." *Oh no! Don't realize that I went there, Grassfang, don't find out...* "Darkstorm and Orangetail, you go to ThunderClan. Badgerleap, I know you're an elder, but can you scout for a camp."

"Yep," Badgerleap growled. "I'm not that old, I can help if you need me to." Treestar nodded gratefully.

"Thinfur, you stay here. If a clan shows itself, run and find us. He's better now, yes?" Treestar asked, looking at Shadeflight.

"Yes."

"Well then. Everyone, get back quickly. We don't know who may attack, and we have to be prepared. Maybe the Twolegs will scare them off, but we won't take any risks." His eyes glinted. "And Orangetail, I am trusting you to go to ThunderClan." Orangetail dipped her head. "Then we'll go now." The cats scattered, Darkstorm and Orangetail going alongside Yowltail and Shadeflight.

"We'll separate at the border," Darkstorm mewed. Yowltail flicked her tail.

"There's something wrong with Treestar," she began hesitantly. "I

think he's worried about the prophecy." She looked at Darkstorm pleadingly. "Try not to challenge his authority, please. I know you don't try to, but you were born a leader, and that never changed." Darkstorm blinked.

"Okay," she promised. "I'll try."

"We should go now," Orangetail mewed.

"Be careful," Darkstorm pointed her ears to Shadeflight. "SkyClan is dangerous." Shadeflight nosed his littermate.

"Don't worry. I'll be fine." Orangetail and Darkstorm made their way through SkyClan territory.

"Hey!" *Rainstar. Why is he patrolling?* Darkstorm cursed herself and looked up.

"We're five tail-lengths-"

"Get out of here!" he snarled. "ShadowClan spies!" Darkstorm looked to Orangetail, who was calmly continuing on her way. Darkstorm's fur bristled.

"We're allowed to be here!" she spat, rivaling his unsheathed claws. Rainstar glared at her and waved his tail threateningly.

"It's my territory. *I* will say if you can be here." He struck out at Orangetail, slicing her side. She spun around, hissing defiantly.

"There are two of us and one of you," she meowed. "Let us go." Rainstar let out a bark of laughter and bared his teeth.

"I told you. *Get out*!" He leaped at her, Darkstorm pushing him away with her side.

"Stop it or we'll fight," she warned. Rainstar scowled.

"You both have one life. I have nine." *No, you don't,* Darkstorm thought, *I'm sure of it. You're too quick to fight.* She snarled and pounced on him, pinning the SkyClan cat down. He rolled away and scraped his claws along her leg.

"Hey!" Orangetail yowled. "That's my *friend*!" she sneered, joining the fight. Darkstorm shrieked as the leader flipped her on her back, rearing back to bite her neck. Orangetail leaped, her claws penetrating Rainstar's soft belly, and he flopped to his side. As Orangetail backed away, he jumped to his feet and rammed into her, aimed for the kill. Darkstorm heaved herself up and bit his back, digging her claws deep. He turned around and sliced her neck.

She yowled and stumbled back, pain sweeping through her body. As he flung himself at her, claws deadly and eyes sharp, a blur of orange shot past, swiping at his neck. Rainstar tumbled to the ground as Orangetail's sides heaved. Blood splattered the dirt.

"He's dead," she murmured. "I killed him!" Darkstorm comforted her wailing friend.

"He's a leader. He'll be back. What choice did you have?" She stroked her back with a long tail. *He'll live, he has to,* she thought. *There's no way he's completely dead, and we have to get out of here.* "We have to go," Darkstorm gently guided Orangetail to ThunderClan territory, and they sat down together, waiting for someone to find them.

"It'll be okay," Orangetail mewed determinedly. "He shouldn't have attacked us when we were obeying the code. He had no reason to." Darkstorm flicked her ears up.

"Patrol," she whispered. "Hello? ThunderClan?" she called. "It's Darkstorm and Orangetail, from ShadowClan," A patrol led by a ginger she-cat stopped in front of them.

"We have a message from Treestar, for Strikestar," Orangetail explained. "About the gathering." The ginger she-cat narrowed by eyes.

"Come," She eyed them distrustfully and flicked her tail. The patrol surrounded them as they made their way to the ThunderClan camp. "Strikestar! They have a message from Treestar!" Strikestar stepped out of a den. *How do they live there?* Darkstorm wondered, looking at the stone hollow. *It must be cold.*

"It's about the gathering," Darkstorm clarified. The patrol sat down, watching them. "Treestar wants to know where we should meet. It's impossible to get to the island now." Strikestar sniffed the air.

"Is that all?"

"No," Orangetail jumped in. "We have to speak to Snarlfang." *No! It's too suspicious, Orangetail!*

"Well then. Go talk. I know that unlike what the other clans think, ShadowClan won't break the code." *He just wants to sound fair. But I really don't care* why *he listens. As long as he does,* Darkstorm mused. She slowly followed Orangetail into Snarlfang's den, where a cat was yowling at him.

"Crazy warrior! You shouldn't even be a medicine cat! What kind of medicine cat name is *Snarlfang*? Just help her!" the grey tom shouted. *Slatepaw?* Slatepaw was sprawled on the ground, chest heaving, with a long scratch down her back.

"Mousesong," Snarlfang mewed. "I know you're upset, but she'll be fine."

"She'd better be!" Mousesong narrowed his amber eyes. "If my kit dies because of your incompetence, I'll... I'll..."

"I get the idea," Snarlfang retorted. "If you want me to help her, get out and let me do my duty." Mousefang's grey pelt bristled as he stormed out. Orangetail's claws pattered against stone as she led Darkstorm in.

"Snarlfang," she whispered. His eyes focused on her for a heartbeat before returning to their odd places. "I need to talk to you."

"I have a half-dead apprentice on my hands," he sighed and sat on his haunches. "A pair of Twolegs tried to grab her. Make her a kittypet, I reckon." He looked up at her and Darkstorm.

"You're the shadows," he snapped. "Help the clans." Darkstorm recoiled. I'm *the shadows? Huh?* Orangetail shook her head at Darkstorm. "You're part of the prophecy," Snarlfang clarified. "But that doesn't matter, not right now. I need marigold. The Twolegs

ridded it from our territory." Orangetail's eyes widened.

"The Twolegs are dooming us," she mewed. Snarlfang closed his eyes, flattening his ears.

"We have to leave. Strikestar won't listen to me." He chewed a leaf, spreading the mush on Slatepaw's scratch. *It looks infected,* Darkstorm thought. *Will she live?*

"We do," she agreed. Snarlfang's eyes skitted to her.

"You're the one who can help us." His fur spiked slightly. "So help us. Quickstar and Coralstar agree. Coralstar was more stubborn, and Quickstar won't go without the other clans, but they do agree. We *need* to leave the lake."

"Snarlfang," Orangetail mewed. "Don't worry. I'm helping her and Shadeflight, and I know for a fact that they want to go. Treestar and Rainstar are the problems.

"And Str-"

"Wait, can't Slatepaw hear us?" Darkstorm interrupted, Snarlfang rolling his eyes with irritation.

"She's far, far away," he murmured, his harsh tone softening. "I wouldn't get my hopes up." He popped a seed in the apprentice's mouth, forcing her to swallow. "Such a shame. Her ceremony was to be in a sunrise..." Orangetail rested her muzzle on his shoulder.

"It isn't your fault. But if she dies, then we know..."

"It's not Arrowheart!" Darkstorm whipped around. "We have to go. Treestar will want us. And we have to ask Strikestar what he thinks." Orangetail and Snarlfang's eyes locked briefly, and the ginger she-cat trodded after Darkstorm.

The ShadowClan forest smelled of Twolegs. It was unpleasant to know that the Twolegs were in the territory, stinking up the pines and cutting them down. *But this isn't the lake dying. It's ShadowClan territory dying,* Darkstorm realized with a shock. *Which means that the worst is yet to come.* She shivered and looked up at the

Pinebranch. Treestar was sitting there, Yowltail beside him.

"Cats of ShadowClan," he rumbled. "Quickstar has told us that he knows no way, but he is willing to hold it on his territory. Yowltail?" Yowltail raised her tail as she spoke.

"Rainstar was missing. There was no news." Treestar nodded slowly.

"Coralstar thinks that we have to leave the lake," Grassfang mewed. Badgerleap shook her head slowly, as if wondering what would become of the senior warrior. "And she says that apaprt from swimming, she doesn't know how to get there."

"We are *not* leaving the lake!" Treestar screeched. "We have a home here!" Seeming to relax, he looked at Darkstorm. "What about ThunderClan?"

"Er..." Orangetail paused.

"Strikestar said that he would be glad to have the gathering on his territory," Darkstorm explained.

"Slatepaw seemed sick," Orangetail added. Darkstorm shot her a glare. *It isn't Arrowheart!* "Dying sick." Treestar tapped his claws against the branch.

"Interesting," he murmured. *Orangetail!* Darkstorm thought furiously. "We shall inform the clans to do it on WindClan territory. ThunderClan would be too smug, and we won't do it on ours. Face it, my clan." Darkstorm gasped as he continued, lashing his tail angrily. "We are weak."

What do you think? What's going to happen? The length of this chapter was good, I think. Do you have your guesses about the book and the prophecy? Please comment them!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Nineteen

[image]

Darkstorm stormed into the warrior's den. "How could you?" she snarled, throwing Orangetail a fierce glare. "You *know* that I told you not to tell him. Maybe I'll just spoil your little secret of visiting Snarlfang!" She ripped a piece of the mouse she was eating, flinging it at Orangetail. "Or maybe I'll say how you *killed* a cat." Orangetail stood frozen, fear-scent rising from her.

"It wa-"

Darkstorm unsheathed her claws. "I don't want to hear it!" she screeched, her ears flattening like leaves on the ground. "You betrayed me, and you didn't realize how I would feel! What kind of friend *are* you?" Orangetail stepped back.

"Let's go hunt with everyone else," she tried.

"What, so that you can get away with treachery? You aren't *loyal*!" Darkstorm raised her haunches. "Fox-heart!" Orangetail gasped, visibly hurt, but Darkstorm didn't stop. "You know what, I *will* tell Treestar! You killed a leader, and he might permanently be dead!" She wanted Orangetail to feel as hurt and betrayed as she had.

"I killed him to save you! Darkstorm, don't say anything you might regret!" Orangetail snapped out of the blue. "I told our leader about Slatepaw, and you wanted me to keep it a secret! *I* am not the one who's loyalties should feel threatened!" Darkstorm stood still.

"You've never had your loyalties threatened," Darkstorm muttered, ominously quiet. "I grew up without a mother. She could've been from anywhere- a different clan cat or a distant rogue. I could even be half *kittypet*. When we were kits, you never let me forget it. And I *know* that everyone has talked about me when I wasn't there. Even as an apprentice. Even as a *warrior*. And when I met with Arrowheart, he was Arrowpaw back then, I felt like the rumors were true. I was a no-good traitor." Darkstorm lashed out, striking

the mouse with her claws and ripping it until it was no more than scraps of flesh and blood. She looked up at Orangetail and finished quietly, "Don't tell me I haven't had my loyalties threatened." She turned and stalked out of the den, feeling anything but triumphant at Orangetail's expression. *No one will ever hurt me again,* she vowed. She looked up at the stars. "It's over," she declared. "I'm loyal. We'll stay at the lake. Arrowheart will destroy the clans. I will stop him." She collapsed to the floor, choking out sad and lonely sobs. *I never wanted this!* She wailed and closed her eyes, and suddenly she smelled Half Moon, turning to find her.

"Don't," the mystical cat mewed. "I know you're hurt. But you *must* leave. You can't turn back. You need Arrowheart and Orangetail, Darkstorm. Don't underestimate them. They will help you and Shadeflight defeat the apprentice." Half Moon paused. "You are right. You know the apprentice, and it is a living one. Convince Treestar to go. You will die if you stay at the lake." Darkstorm flopped down, barely hearing the news.

"I was cruel to her," she murmured. "Orangetail didn't deserve that. I don't deserve *her*." Half Moon began to fade away.

"Don't worry. She'll forgive you. And you deserve more than any cat would think..."

...

Darkstorm sat down, her tail curled around her haunches. "I'm sorry," she mewed. "It's just that everything is so- so overwhelming, and we have to save the clans, and Snarlfang said that *I* have to! Me! I can't even keep my emotions in check and StarClan thinks I'll save you!" Orangetail nuzzled her friend.

"It's alright." She paused at Treestar's yowl. "Treestar wants us. Come." *But it isn't! I was so harsh!* Darkstorm wailed silently as she peered up at her leader.

"The gathering will be the same time as usual, on WindClan's territory. Badgerleap has found a new camp deeper in the territory that I approve of, and we will move there as soon as this meeting is over. Any cats that are *not loyal* may leave in peace, now." *Shut*

it! Darkstorm thought angrily. As no cat moved, Treestar went on.

"The issue of if we will stay at the lake will be taken up at the gathering, and as will the issue of the apprentice. Everyone, follow me and Badgerleap to the new camp." Treestar's voice rung through the group of cats. She shook herself and got up, heading to Shadeflight as they began to trek.

"I wonder how the lake will die," she murmured. Her littermate shrugged.

"Who knows?" He licked his chest fur. "But I think we all will, and soon." Darkstorm was quiet, deep in her thoughts, as Treestar announced that they were there. She sighed and looked around. It was a marsh, much like the one at the Dead Tree, but with wildflowers and herbs sprouting from the edges instead of grass. In the middle was a large patch of ground, big enough for the cats to all be on at the same time. Clumps of weeds were growing from the murky water, but although brownish, the marsh held drinkable water. In the middle of the patch of ground, a spindly tree was growing, with branches and leaves drooping around the little island. *Like a queen protecting her kits,* Darkstorm observed with a sad tail-swish. She could hardly see through the branches, and knew it would grant them protection. Although beautiful, this place had a protective, thick air.

"Hey, this is where ShadowClan medicine cats gather a lot," Shadeflight mewed. "Lots of herbs, and there's a special feeling when you step on the smaller island, like StarClan watching over you." Darkstorm followed his gaze to a smaller island with a log similar to a bridge guiding from the reeds to it. *It's almost like a gathering island. Wait.* An idea struck her.

"What if this can be our new home, and-"

"No." Shadeflight shook his head sadly. "It would be too simple. StarClan wouldn't put us through everything if the answer was in our *territory*." Darkstorm sighed, knowing he was right. It couldn't be a place right under their noses. She padded into the marsh. It wasn't so deep that she had to swim, but she as she waded through it she realized how thick it was. *How long will we be able to keep this*

up? She entered the island. The tree 's shadow darkened the inside, but she could easily make out a comfortable clearing. *We can use the brranches to make little dens,* she thought. *But we warriors will probably have to sleep in the open. Not that it's dangerous. Surely no cat would suspect us to live here?* She jumped back, catching the glimpse of sleek fur.

"Weasel!" she screeched, unsheathing her claws. Grassfang and Treestar, who had gotten in beforre her, turned and yelped, while the rest of SHadowClan rushed in. *We're hardly more than a battle patrol!* Darkstorm thought, shocked. *And Badgerleap always has to help us! She deserves some peace and quiet; we all do!* She froze as she heard a low noise. She gasped. *There's two!*

So what do you think? Will any of the cats die, and will Treestar finally let the clans leave? Because it doesn't look like they're going to without him... And what about Rainstar? You'll find out soon, so please keep reading!

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty

[image]

Shadeflight and Darkstorm let out twin screeches as the weasels prepared to launch themselves. Darkstorm blinked rapidly and pounced on the smaller one's back. "They're probably mates!" she shouted. "Which means we have to get rid of them quickly, or there'll be kits!" Treestar arched his back and hissed at the bigger weasel, followed by Grassfang. Yowltail rushed to help Darkstorm, while Badgerleap clawed the bigger one. Shadeflight stepped back and then forward, as if unsure what to do. *Get herbs!* Shadeflight came to his senses and rushed out of the island.

The weasel dodged Yowltail and Darkstorm with ease, and Darkstorm snarled. She lashed out with her claws and felt satisfaction as they met its pelt. Yowltail drove it back, clawing its snout, then jumped as it bit her leg. Darkstorm gritted her teeth and pulled out a tuft of fur. The weasel turned around and slashed her muzzle. She yowled and stabbed her claws in its back.

"Get back!" Yowltail shrieked. "We need a plan! Retreat!" Darkstorm obeyed, fleeing. She was followed by the rest. She panted.

"We have to separate them," Badgerleap growled. "One at a time, but no more." Treestar nodded thoughtfully.

"It has to be quick, and soon." Grassfang licked his fur down. "And Shadeflight needs herbs ready, right?" Shadeflight, who had come back in time for the retreat, nodded. Darkstorm's ears fluttered.

"Let's do it now," she suggested boldly. Treestar widened his eyes.

"I think you're right," he agreed. "As soon as we separate them and Shadeflight gets his herbs."

"I'll go now." Shadeflight trodded off. "I'll be back soon." Darkstorm shivered, watching him go.

"How will we get them to separate?" Yowltail asked. Treestar was silent for a moment, and then muttered, "Maybe if we lure one away with prey?" Darkstorm flicked her tail.

"That might work. But can we spare the prey?" Treestar nodded.

"You were right," he murmured quietly. "We have to leave the lake. There is nothing for us here." Darkstorm looked to the ground. "We can spare the prey. We only need to see if Rainstar wants to leave, and we will." Yowltail and Grassfang looked at each other. Thinfur came out of the bushes.

"I'm healed," he announced. Shadeflight rollwed his eyes, coming back to overhear.

"No, you're not." He began to lead his father away. Thinfur scowled.

"Wait," Badgerleap mewed slowly. "Where's Orangetail? Where has she gone?" She sniffed the air, her voice rising in a wail. "Where's my kit?" Darkstorm gulped. *Orangetail! Orangetail, where are you?* Treestar leaped to his paws.

"We'll retrace our steps."

...

Darkstorm stared at the border. "She went to ThunderClan," she conceded. "She left. She left!" They had gone along the whole SkyClan border tracing her scent. Badgerleap yowled with grief.

"It was you!" She spun to look at Treestar, fury lighting her gaze. "You! It was you with your smart talk that made her leave! It was *you*!" Darkstorm backed down.

"She and I had a fight," she murmured. "What if it was because of *me*?" She scrambled to Badgerleap. "It was me! It was my fault, I'm sorry!" she wailed, her ears flattening in terror.

"No, it wasn't," Badgerleap mewed firmly. "She told me about your fight. She didn't care. She didn't mind; you were just venting." *She knows,* Darkstorm thought with a panic, as Badgerleap looked

straight into her eyes. "But Treestar, you... you..." she sputtered for a word, deciding on turning around and stomping back to their territory. Darkstorm sighed and followed after her. *It's my fault. I know it is.*

The weasel reared back as the cats surrounded it. "Push it back!" Treestar ordered. "If we drive this one out, the other one won't come back either!" Darkstorm clawed the animal as it swung around, snapping. She dodged a bite.

"It's overwhelmed," she yowled. "It'll go soon!" Sure enough, as Grassfang delivered a final blow, the weasel ran. Darkstorm breathed a sigh of relief, then yelped. "Yowltail!" All the warriors were bloody and in need of medical attention, but Yowltail's side had been split open with sharp claws, and she was barely standing. Darkstorm guided Shadeflight to her, and he blinked.

"Hand me marigold," he ordered, putting something on her wounds. She obeyed and he set to his work, grumbling under his breath. "She won't be able to go to the gathering this moonhigh."

"Will she live?" Badgerleap asked. Shadeflight said nothing, spreading more mush on her slashes.

"We should go," Treestar ordered gently. "It will take a while to get to WindClan territory. Badgerleap and Darkstorm, you'll come." *We can't spare anymore cats,* Darkstorm thought grimly, getting to her paws. Badgerleap scowled. *She has to stop blaming Treestar. It was my fault!* She padded after the two older ShadowClan cats, towards WindClan territory. When they arrived, they were greeted by the other clans.

"Orangetail isn't here," Badgerleap observed. "ThunderClan has better taken her in. If she's a rogue now, then they'll be sorry." She unsheathed her claws. Darkstorm blinked and went after Arrowheart.

"Next half-moon," he muttered.

"Can't we talk, just this gathering?" she asked. Arrowheart sat down and nodded. "There were two weasels," she murmured. "We fought

them off just now, but Yowltail might die. We've had to move our camp because of the Twolegs." Arrowheart winced.

"We've lost our camp, too," he admitted. "Not Twolegs, though. The lake. It died." Darkstorm jumped to her feet.

"You know how it died? You know?" she asked. Arrowheart looked at the leaders, who were on a patch of dry grass.

"We have new kits!" Coralstar mewed, drawing their attention. "But we've had to move our camp, due to Twolegs." Her face darkened. "We think we know how the lake will die. It already did." Gasps and murmurs rippled through the clans. "But I'll clear that after, or we'll spend the whole night here."

Darkstorm itched with impatience as Quickstar said something about needing to leave soon.

"A cat made her appearance at our camp," Strikestar mewed. Darkstorm closed her eyes. *Orangetail!* "We have let her stay at our camp. But that isn't important. We need to leave the lake." Coralstar and Quickstar nodded, and Treestar waved his tail. The cats turned to him.

"We lost our camp and fought two weasels. ShadowClan will join you. We must leave."

"Where's Rainstar?" a tabby she-cat asked.

"Yeah, where?" The SkyClan cats parted, and a tabby she-cat stepped up.

"I am Stonestar." She bowed her head and gazed at the cats with startling bright green eyes. "Rainstar died from an infection after we fought a badger." *It wasn't Orangetail!* "But I will make SkyClan better, as it was before. ShadowClan, I apologize on the behalf of all of my clan. We have attacked and taken advantage of you when you were in need of help."

"Maybe Stonestar will be better for everyone," Darkstorm heard someone mew.

"Same goes with every other clan," Stonestar continued. "Our new deputy is Tenderleaf. Rainstar did not want to leave the lake, but I believe we must. However, before I make my final decision, how did the lake die?" Coralstar bowed her head.

"It didn't flood, and it didn't dry up," she mewed. "The lake... It..."

Woohoo, a cliffhanger! Yes! These are fun to write, but not to read...

-Shadowstorm

Update

Ha ha, I had to put some more 'cliffhangering'. So first you have to read this, and then I'll write how the lake 'died'. Sorry to disappoint you, but the next chapter will be pretty long, so you'll have to wait a while before you can see it.

I'm really happy that I've gotten views, votes, comments and followers. Thank you so much! XD

I know in a lot of places I ask you guys to comment and vote, but that's because the more popular this book is, the more people will look, and it makes me *so happy* when I see that someone viewed or voted on my books. And when I see that you kept reading- that's when I *really* lose it! Because that means you like the story, and I'm so glad that you do! That's the whole point of my writing- I want to make people happy!

I love reading and writing *so much*, and I can't believe my *first* story that once had 4 views now has 374. You guys break my heart. I'm seriously melting! Every time I look, I see at least one more, and now you've started *voting* and *commenting* and *following* me! I don't even know what I can say! I'm just so happy!

Soon, things in the book will get *really* interesting. I know that you weren't expecting Orangetail to fall in love with Snarlfang, but hey, love make stories interesting!

I'm still happy if you have a suggestion for the title or cover of this. I've decided that it will be a single book, sort of like a super edition. Maybe something like 'Darkstorm's __'? I dunno. So I'll post chapters about two or three times a week, maybe four, but sometimes a bit less. Again, the next chapter will be *very* long and hopefully satisfying (I mean, I don't want you all to be bored), so it will take a few days to write. Thanks for reading this and please keep doing so! :)

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-One

[image]

Coralstar looked to the ground. "It... I shouldn't tell you," she mewed, shaken. Darkstorm shivered. *How bad can it be?* "I'll show you. Come, all of you, please." Her usually calm and commanding eyes were scared and hopeless now. Arrowheart sighed.

"Come," He got up and began to walk in the direction of the RiverClan camp. Darkstorm sighed and followed him. All the cats had gotten up and started to walk in the same direction. *Is this what the great journey was like?* Darkstorm pondered. *All the clans together, all heading for the same place?* She shook her head. *What am I thinking? Nobody knew where they were going in the Great Journey. We do. RiverClan territory.* She glanced at Arrowheart. His grey fur was waving in the wind. *How could he be the apprentice? It can't be him. It can't. I know it isn't.* She nodded determinedly. *I trust him, and I know he's not the apprentice. It's Slatepaw. Slatepaw!*

"We're here," Arrowheart mewed.

Darkstorm blinked. His mew had interrupted her train of thought.

"That was quicker than expected." She sighed and looked up. The old RiverClan camp was completely gone; all it was now was a barren field of dirt and mud. "What..." Arrowheart's ears twitched.

"Shh," he murmured. "There might be Twolegs." *They live like us now,* Darkstorm realized with horror. *It's all Twolegs.*

"But how did the lake die?" she inquired. Coralstar, overhearing, padded over to them. Her gaze held a slight anger. *She told Arrowheart to not go near me,* Darkstorm remembered. She lifted her head. *So what? I don't care.*

"You'll see." She flicked her tail. "You're determined, aren't you." It was more of a statement than a question, but she felt the need to answer.

"Yes. Yes, I *am*." Coralstar cocked her head.

"You remind me of myself, when I was your age. Stubborn." Darkstorm didn't know what to make of this, so she nodded curtly and continued to walk, this time towards the lake.

"Oh," she mewed breathlessly. "The lake..." She watched the moon. Clouds drifted around it, careful not to cover the light. *ALmost as if StarClan is angry. Oh, the lake...* "They're still mad at us," she mewed under her breath. "StarClan is still mad. I can feel it." Gasps rose and filled the air. Stonestar's jaw dropped.

"What happened?" It was obvious, but no one wanted to admit it. The five clans looked at each other.

"Twolegs happened." Darkstorm spoke up. "Didn't they?" She looked at the lake once more. It was a horrible sight. Huge monsters were swimming in the lake, something black mingling in the water. It had lost its usual clear colour. Scraps littered it and Twolegs were building an arc over the whole thing. The rivers were blocked off and dead fish were floating to the surface. Water-birds were flapping weak wings and leaving the water, flying away from their camps. *I can't believe it,* she thought. The drastic changes to the lake were terrible.

"But... the island," an apprentice mewed nervously. "Look at it!" Darkstorm followed his gaze and stepped back, shocked. The island was still there, but Twolegs had ridden it of trees. Instead, there was a large building. Twolegs were going in and coming out of it, more than Darkstorm had ever seen.

"What about the moonpool?" a dappled white cat asked. *She's Cloudstorm, SkyClan's medicine cat,* Darkstorm recalled.

"We haven't checked," Coralstar mewed in a fragile voice. "Has any medicine cat gone to the-" Shadeflight, Grassfang, Badgerleap, Thinfur and Yowltail appeared over a mound of mud.

"What are Yowltail and Thinfur doing out of the medicine den?" Treestar demanded. "I mean, the medicine island?" Shadeflight opened his mouth to speak, but Badgerleap answered instead.

"Twolegs. The beautiful islands are swarming with Twolegs now." She looked at the clans with scared eyes. "We have to make another Great Journey," she pleaded. Coralstar nodded.

"We have to go *now*." She took a deep breath. "RiverClan is going." Stonestar dipped her head.

"SkyClan, too. We don't want to be separated from the clans again." Quickstar narrowed his eyes, thinking.

"WindClan will join you."

"As will ThunderClan."

"ShadowClan, too." Treestar agreed, sealing the choice. Darkstorm let out a whimper of terror, and Shadeflight spoke her thoughts.

"Can't we... But... Can't we see our territory, our homes, one last time?" he begged. "Please! We have no idea where we're heading. We could all die. This could be the end of the clans." Treestar bit his lip, and Strikestar lifted his tail.

"Yes. Why don't we make a circle, all the clans together, around the lake? Let's remember how safe and beautiful it used to be. And we'll go to the moonpool and see what StarClan has to say." Cloudstar, Coralstar and Quickstar nodded.

"No!" Thinfur screeched. "After we go there, we *must* go to Rabbitear! We can save her!" Treestar stared at him.

"You don't make ShadowClan's descisions. We will go around the lake, and then to the moonpool. And then... we'll see." Quickstar snarled.

"Rabbitear disappeared moons ago," he hissed. "She's dead. We're not falling into your trap." Thinfur unsheathed his claws, his fur spiking.

"Stop!" Snarlfang yowled. "There's a truce! And that truce will last until we find a new home!" Quickstar and Thinfur glared at each other, sheathing their claws. *Didn't he say that Rabbitear's our mother? A WindClan cat, our mother. Actually, I don't mind. I agree*

with Orangetail- there should be no law in the code about loving.

"Let's go," Strikestar mewed. The cats murmured to each other as they went.

"The lake," Yowltail flattened her ears sadly. "I can't... I've lived a long life here. My fur is turning gray. I always thought I would die an elder, beside the lake with a huge, thriving clan beside me." She looked down. "It's terrible. I don't want this to be real- I want this all to be a dream." Darkstorm felt weird, having a senior warrior and deputy confide in her. Grassfang sighed.

"Me too. But once we leave, we'll never see the lake or the tribe of Rushing Water again." Darkstorm blinked. She had heard of the mountain cats, but had never met them. "Stoneteller was kind. And that to-be, Eagle's Wing Under Teeth. She must be a cave-guard by now."

"And Flower That Blows Through Wind," Thinfur added. "He was training to be Stoneteller, no?" Yowltail nodded.

"But we won't see them," she repeated sadly. "Ever." Darkstorm looked at Arrowheart.

"Come," he mewed. "Let's look at my camp." He was trembling, scared. *His camp. There isn't much of it left either way... The whole of the clans saw. Poor RiverClan. Poor Arrowheart.* She nudged his side.

"I can go, if you want," she offered. Arrowheart shook his head.

"Stay." His fur brushed hers, and he closed his eyes. "You know how hard this is. You have to leave the lake, too. But RiverClan... We live by the water. We use it. We drink it. We fight in it. We hunt in it. We swim in it. But now... We're leaving the lake. And we won't be following a river on the journey. We'll be guided by StarClan, and StarClan is mad at us." He muttered something else under his breath.

"Don't worry," Darkstorm mewed reassuringly. "I know this is hard, but... It'll be okay. We'll live- all of us, all of the clans." Darkstorm watched as Coralstar announced the news to the rest of RiverClan,

and they joined the cats. Arrowheart sniffed a bed of reeds.

"It smells of fish," He took a deep breath. "I want that smell to be with me, always. Of rivers and the lake and prey." Darkstorm sighed.

"I'm sorry," Shadeflight mewed, coming from behind them. "Even StarClan cannot promise that."

...

Darkstorm watched as WindClan set on their way. *So now we'll go to the ThunderClan camp... And Orangetail.* She padded through the bracken. "How do ThunderClan walk and hunt with all this undergrowth?" Arrowheart purred with amusement.

"How do RiverClan cats swim? They learn!"

"Our hollow," Strikestar mewed bleakly. "We're leaving our hollow. ThunderClan!"

"Str- Why is every clan here?" a white tom with spiky fur demanded. The rest of ThunderClan slowly gathered, asking the same question.

"Slatepaw needs quiet!" Snarlfang barked from beside Strikestar and Boltfur. "The lake is dead and we're leaving. You'll see it when we leave. Trust me, we must le-"

"*Why*, exactly, should we trust you?" Darkstorm recognized Mousesong. "Everyone knows that you were first a warrior! You never were fit to heal us, and you're eccentric!" Snarlfang unsheathed his claws.

"Strikestar made these decisions. We will leave. But first, we will thank StarClan for giving us a safe camp for many moons." A reddish tabby she-cat flicked her tail for attention.

"My mate is right. You're eccentric. And didn't you say that StarClan is *mad* at us?"

"They are. But that doesn't mean they don't guide us." Furrypaw

stepped up.

"I don't know much about StarClan," he mewed, "but I do know that they work in mysterious ways. And Strikestar is telling us to leave. Will you obey the warrior code, or not?" Heatpelt scowled.

"My own kit is telling me to obey the warrior code." She looked at Strikestar. "Have it your way. I won't argue." She sighed and walked into the crowd. Mousesong and a blue-eyed apprentice followed. *She's sort of nasty,* Darkstorm thought. *Huh. Mousesong too. No wonder Slatepaw is so mean- but Furrypaw isn't, and he's* also *their kit.*

"Orangetail!" Badgerleap cried. *Orangetail?* A bright ginger she-cat made her way towards them. Darkstorm grinned, recognizing her friend.

"Arrowheart, you and Orangetail haven't really met. Arrowheart, Orangetail. Orangetail, Arrowheart."

"Hey," Orangetail mewed. "Sorry I left. But Snarlfang's here, and the only way to be with him is to be in ThunderClan. I have to change the medicine cat code now, too," she added ruefully. Badgerleap nuzzled her kit, and Darkstorm left them, talking to Arrowheart. *Ha. When I met him, I thought he wasn't talkative. I was wrong.*

"We'll go now," Strikestar announced. His eyes darted to Snarlfang. "Maybe you should bring herbs?" Snarlfang sighed.

"Yes, I'll take traveling herbs and make them into a poultice along the way."

"I'll help," Shadeflight offered. "Just until we get to ShadowClan territ-"

A loud crash interrupted them.

"Twolegs!" a queen screeched. "We'll go to SkyClan using the tunnels!" Tunnel training was expected from all ThunderClan cats, as the main network of them was in their territory. *Another thing we can miss. The ancient cats lived here once. This is an important place in clan history.* The cats darted through the tunnels, led by ThunderClan. Darkstorm helped an elder manage her way through a

rockier ground.

"We're here!" someone shouted. "Those stones, turn them!" A group of cats obeyed, and a shaft of light filtered into the tunnels. Darkstorm didn't mind the dark, but was thankful for open space as they walked through the SkyClan camp.

"It feels weird," she confided in Arrowheart. "I mean, ShadowClan has been enemies with SkyClan for so long now, and here we are, strolling through their camp." Arrowheart nodded understandingly.

"Like WindClan and ThunderClan. RiverClan... doesn't try to make enemies." He flashed her a mocking grin. "You mange-pelt ShadowClan cats love to, of course."

"Yeah, right!" Darkstorm retorted. *This feels good. Even though we're under all this pressure, I can trust Arrowheart, and he can trust me.*

"That will change," Stonestar mewed, overhearing. "Hopefully we won't all be enemies after this. I trust that we'll survive- StarClan will lead us." Darkstorm nodded. *Finally. A SkyClan leader that isn't set for attacking ShadowClan. Maybe leaving the lake will have benefits. Yeah. It will.*

As Darkstorm stared at her old camp, her hopes plummeted. *This won't have* any *benefits!* She wordlessly howled her grief. "I'm here," Arrowheart reminded her. "I'll keep you safe. This hurts, but it'll be okay. It'll be okay. It'll be okay," he repeated. She let the words soothe her. She could hear yowling Twolegs and roaring monsters in the near distance, but she didn't care. Her camp that she had grown up in. Her camp where she had recieved her warrior name. She was leaving it. *Am I selfish?* she wondered. *It's just a place. But... I can't imagine life without it.*

She padded over to the medicine den, where the four medicine cats were busy making traveling herbs. *Before, the scent disagreed with me.* She inhaled, smelling the bitter herbs and sweet honey. *Now, I never want to leave it.*

She hooked her claws into the ground as she entered the apprentice's den. *I remember this place so, so well. When I was*

Darkpaw, I never realized the weight of my responsibilities- the weight of the prophecy. I wish it was still like that. She walked into the elder's den.

It smells like Badgerleap here. She probably wanted to die here, where she was born. A fierce wave of protectiveness rushed into Darkstorm. *Well, she won't. She'll die in a better place, with a better code, and a better everything. I won't let her give up. The prophecy will guide us to a new territory.* Then she looked to the nursing den.

I was a kit here. I didn't know about the prophecy then. It was fun. It was an easy, laid-back life. She ran out, not wanting the memories. If she didn't have them, she wouldn't feel so bad. She dashed into the leader's den.

Fernstar's den, she remembered. *She didn't trust us. At the end, she wasn't well. But before that, I've heard that she was a great leader. The best.* Sadness choked her, and she leaned against Arrowheart. She sat in front of the warriors den, her tail wrapped around her paws.

And this... This was the hard place. I started being responsible here. I started thinking properly. She slowly went forward, her fur spiking. *This is the last place in my camp that I'll see. I won't mess this up. I know that this is hard. Everyone knows. But I will* never *forget this place.* She narrowed her sharp yellow eyes. *Never.*

...

As WindClan finished their good-byes and the clans headed for the moonpool, Shadeflight raised his tail. "Everyone. Kits, queens and elders, come forward first. We don't have traveling herbs for everyone, and you need them most." The medicine cats divided the traveling herbs between the chosen cats. Darkstorm froze in embarrassment as her belly let out a huge rumble.

"Um..." she muttered. "We're near the moonpool, right?" Shadeflight nodded.

"Just over that bend." He pointed with his tail. The cats trotted over, and Darkstorm stifled a gasp.

"It's beautiful," she murmured. "The Twolegs haven't reached here yet."

"They will," a brown tom guessed grimly. "I'm Beechleap. The WindClan medicine cat. You?"

"I'm Darkstorm. This is Arrowheart. What do you think StarClan will tell you?" Beechleap shrugged.

"Who knows? Most likely where to go."

"Oh."

"It's getting late," Finspot mewed, coming to nudge Beechleap. "We have to go and meet with StarClan. Hopefully they'll tell us something about where to go." The cats were already settling down to sleep. Darkstorm sighed and lay down, closing her eyes tiredly. *Everything will be better in the morning. Everything.*

"Follow the brightest star," a voice whispered in her ear. Darkstorm spun around to see a bright orange tom.

"Who are you?"

"Firestar. You want to know where to go and why StarClan is mad, yes? Follow the brightest star until you reach the moon." Firestar began to walk away.

"Wait! What moon? What star?" Darkstorm demanded. Firestar looked at her closely.

"I would tell you. But the roots of the clans are mad, and I can't disobey them. You'll reach the moon. Just follow the brightest star." Darkstorm jerked her eyes open. *The brightest star?* She looked up at Silverpelt. There was a star that was brighter than the rest, as if it was an important warrior leading the way. *We have to follow it,* Darkstorm thought. *That's the star!* She closed her eyes once more. *I'll tell them in the morning. Anyone else could be having impor...* her thoughts stopped. *Where's Arrowheart?* She sniffed the air, following a trail of scent.

"Arrowheart!" she whispered. "Where are you?" A loud growl made

her run forward. "Arrowheart!" she called frantically. She was well away from the moonpool. Why had he gone so far? His scent washed away in a river. Darkstorm paused, deciding where to go, and began to follow it. The water led in the direction of the growling, and she figured it would lead to him. "Arrowh-"

"I asked you, if you're StarClan, then *where do we go*?" Arrowheart's voice interrupted. He stopped, as if listening to someone, and continued. "*Great* answer! Why should the medicine cats ask the rest of StarClan if you can tell us in two heartbeats?"

"Arrowheart!" Darkstorm yowled. She burst through a thick bush and stopped. "Arrowheart?" The broad-shouldered RiverClan cat was dripping with blood, but not another scent. *The red StarClan warrior!* she recalled. *Is that who he's talking to? But... StarClan shouldn't hurt him!* She unsheathed her claws.

"Who attacked you?" she demanded. Arrowheart turned.

"You followed me!" He didn't seem to be mad, although his fur was bristling. "I'm training with the red warrior," he explained. "I don't want for her to train me how to play-fight. I want to learn to be a *real* warrior. She says that means I have to train with unsheathed claws." He spun around, jaws snapping, as a red scratch appeared on his side.

"Arrowheart! Who *is* this cat, though?"

"Redleaf. She was a deputy when she died." Darkstorm relaxed. *Then she knows what she's doing.*

"Oh." Arrowheart lashed out with his claws at an invisible force, a triumphant grin on his muzzle as his claws turned red.

"I'll go now," Darkstorm mewed queasily. She padded away.

...

"We have to follow the brightest star," she blurted. "Firestar visited me in a dream. He said that we have to follow the brightest star until we reach the moon, and then we'll know what to do." Thinfur's eyes widened, but he said nothing. Treestar paced around in a

circle.

"I say we follow it. Shadeflight, you didn't have any dreams?"

"No. Neither did the rest of us," Shadeflight mewed, his gaze flicking to the rest of the medicine cats.

"Then we should," Coralstar agreed. Quickstar and Strikestar nodded. Stonestar shuffled her paws nervously.

"Er... She's not even a senior warrior." Her gaze was apologetic. "Why should we listen to her? I mean, I doubt she's lying, but it could've just been a weird dream. Why would StarClan visit *her*?" The she-cat's eyes narrowed. "Did they *ever* visit her?" Darkstorm's fur bristled.

"Half Moon has white fur and green eyes. Shadeflight, am I right?" Her littermate flicked his tail agreeingly.

"You're her littermate," the SkyClan leader pointed out. "Look, I don't want to cause trouble, but we're risking everything. If she's wrong, then maybe we'll die on the journey. I think we should wait until *StarClan* says something. To us, or the medicine cats."

"Darkstorm knows the difference between a normal dream and an actual visit from StarClan!" Arrowheart snarled defiantly. *Oh, great. Now there's a crowd. A crowd of cats from the other clans.* Coralstar hissed.

"There's nothing special about her! Arrowheart," she mewed in a softer yet terrifying tone, "do you *like* Darkstorm?" *She knows the answer,* Darkstorm thought anxiously.

"No!" she yowled. "Arrowheart has nothing to do with this. He just thinks I'm right, that's all." Heatpelt unsheathed her claws, followed by Mousesong and a few other cats. *ALmost all of RiverClan,* she realized in horror.

"It's against the code!" Stonestar mewed with a frantic look in her eyes. "He can't!" *Shut up!* Darkstorm thought angrily, her fur bristling. Thinfur pushed forward.

"Darkstorm and Arrowheart are loyal!" he screeched. An amber she-cat pushed her way forward.

"That's what *you* say. But you killed my littermates, which is beyond the warrior code!"

"I killed Swiftfoot. But that was to save my leader. *Not* beyond the warrior code." The she-cat's amber eyes glittered with hate.

"You killed Rabbitear, too! You loved each other! You had *kits*!" she accused, waving her tail at Darkstorm and Shadeflight. The cats gasped. "But if you had *truly* loved her, you wouldn't have let her go. You would have made her stay!" A growl rose from the she-cat's throat. Thinfur glared at her.

"Yes, I love her. Yes, she is the mother of my kits. But she is *not dead* and I did not betray her! I would give my life-"

"Thinfur!" Treestar spat. "Leave!" Thinfur stepped back.

"But-"

"I said *leave*! You are a *rogue*! You broke the code!" He launched himself at Darkstorm's father, scratching his haunches. "*Leave*!" Thinfur cast a look at Darkstorm and Shadeflight, turned around, and ran.

"No!" Darkstorm and Shadeflight shrieked simultaneously. Treestar glared at them.

"Be happy you're staying, *half-clans*." Arrowheart screeched a battle cry and swiped his claws at the leader. Treestar spun around. Arrowheart dodged the brown tom with skill, then ducked under him and swiped at his belly. *He's winning,* Darkstorm realized. Treestar yowled and rolled over, his teeth meeting Arrowheart's ear. A loud *rippppp* filled the air, followed by Arrowheart yelping and stumbling back. Part of his ear had been bitten off. Arrowheart turned into a blur, biting and scratching so fast that Treestar couldn't counterattack or dodge. Grassfang leaped into the battle, but still Arrowheart could not be stopped.

Treestar fell to the ground as Arrowheart stopped swiveling, teeth

embedded his neck. Grassfang and the rest of the cats ran over to Treestar, except for Darkstorm.

"Arrowheart," she mewed quietly. "You have to go. They'll kill you. He's losing a life." She rested her muzzle on his shoulder. "You must."

Sadness welled up in their eyes.

"I'll see you again," Arrowheart whispered. "I *will*. If I can't find you, I'll make Redleaf show me how."

"Follow the brightest star," Darkstorm pleaded. "I'll convince them to follow it, and we'll meet when we reach the moon, or whatever's at the end of the trail."

"I love you," Arrowheart murmured. "I'm sorry I hurt your leader. But he called you half-clan. He made your father a rogue."

"I love you, too." Darkstorm felt stared heating her pelt and cats running forward. "Go. You have no choice." Arrowheart licked her shoulder like an apprentice to a leader, and turned around, running trough the wind.

Oooh that was sort of romantic. Sorry if the lake didn't 'die' very interestingly. I tried to make it good, but hey, I'm not a published author! This was *way* longer than I expected, and it took *way* less time, too. Yay for me! Did you like this?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-Two

[image]

They don't blame us, Darkstorm thought. *They don't blame Shadeflight and I that Thinfur loved Rabbitear. And they don't blame me for Arrowheart. But too bad.* Her gaze hardened as she spotted Coralstar. *I blame them.*

Shadeflight came up to her, followed by Orangetail. "It's unfair," Orangetail spat quietly. "Why do cats get to love each other if we don't get to love certain cats?"

"The warrior code isn't stupid. But it has to be changed," Shadeflight agreed. Darkstorm bared her teeth angrily.

"It *is* stupid. No cat agrees with it, except for the leaders."

"At least they're going in the direction of the brightest star," Badgerleap mewed, padding up to them. Darkstorm sunk into the ground. *Only because they have no other choice. Where else could they go?* She sighed.

"We're going to stop here," Quickstar announced. "Ravenfur, Dewpaw and Amberflight, go on a hunting patrol."

"Voleecho, Hardclaw and Boltfur, you join them," Strikestar added. "And Stonepaw." Coralstar and Stonestar simultaneously told Mosstail, Lakefoot and Sparrownose to go. Treestar narrowed his eyes.

"Grassfang, you too. And Yowltail, scout ahead for the next best route." *He doesn't trust the rest of us,* Darkstorm realized, a tremor of shock slithering down her spine. She watched, dumbfounded, as the chosen cats left. *Badgerleap defended Orangetail too quickly, and Orangetail likes Snarlfang. Shadeflight... He sort of trusts Shadeflight, but not a lot, because he's half-clan. And he trusts me the least- I'm half-clan, I like a now-rogue once-RiverClan cat, and I challenge everything he says. But Grassfang and Yowltail are on our side-* my *side. Hmm...*

But he certainly won't admit it. That'll make ShadowClan- all of us- traitors. That's what he thinks. Hmmph.

"How is ShadowClan going to get new kits?" Orangetail blurted. Treestar growled. "I mean, you and Grassfang have had kits, and Shadeflight's a medicine cat, so it's not like there are any toms." Darkstorm nodded.

"She's right!" Darkstorm snarled. "Don't pretend you think you have a solution! Because if we follow the code, then you *don't*!" Coralstar perked her ears.

"She's right, you know. Other than letting a rogue tom join your clan-" Coralstar paused. "Not Arrowheart. I mean a full-blown rogue."

"Maybe it's the end of ShadowClan," Mousesong mewed slyly. *Don't you even think about it, ThunderClan fox-heart!* Shadeflight swung his head to meet Mousesong's.

"Yeah, right. And I suppose you're the best cat in the clans?" Mousesong bared his teeth, his haunches rising. Shadeflight unsheathed his claws. *He barely knows how to fight!* Darkstorm stiffened, about to leap in between the toms, when a yowl sounded behind them.

"It's Boltfur!" Hardclaw screeched. "Two foxes attacked us!" Snarlfang ran towards them, sniffing the she-cat. Boltfur's fur was bloody, with scratches and bites rippling down her sides. Darkstorm winced.

"How is she?" Strikestar demanded. *Why's he wo... Of course! They're littermates! And she doesn't look so good...*

"She's dead," Snarlfang mewed grimly. He turned away. "I have to give Slatepaw a poultice." Strikestar scrambled towards Boltfur's body.

"Who will be the new deputy?" a cat yowled. Strikestar flattened his ears.

"He- Heatpelt," he stammered. "You trained Thorntail to be a good

warrior, and you have a leader's instincts." Heatpelt dipped her head as Strikestar's fur smoothed. *He thinks* she's *a good choice? The snottiest and meanest cat in the clans?*

"You should send a patrol to get rid of the foxes," Shadeflight mewed. "I'll go with herbs, and Darkstorm would be useful. Maybe also Orangetail..." *He's trying to make Treestar trust us!* Darkstorm realized.

"I think so, too," Stonestar agreed. "I'll send Grassleap."

"Mousesong and Bushpaw,"

"Ravenfur."

"Fishnose." Treestar, seeming to realize he was outnumbered, nodded.

"Shadeflight, Orangetail and Darkstorm, you can go. Be back by moonhigh." Darkstorm nodded excitedly. "Go now."

The fox patrol headed off, led by Ravenfur. "This way," the WindClan deputy murmured, swerving sideways. "Here!" Orangetail stepped back. Two well-muscled dog foxes were heading towards them with a murderous glint in their eyes.

"Scatter!" Fishnose ordered. "Attack from different angles!" Darkstorm ran to the side, leaping onto the darker orange one.

"Help!" Shadeflight screeched. The redder fox was going for him, baring its long fangs. Darkstorm pelted for him, her teeth sinking into the fox's back. Bushpaw, Ravenfur and Fishnose ran to help her, and they slowly drove away the first fox. Darkstorm breathed a sigh of relief. *That was... Easier than ex-* The other fox bit her tail and she yowled in pain. *This one is the strong one!* She turned around and cawed its eyes, missing narrowly and hitting its muzzle. The fox roared in anger and slammed a dark paw on her belly. Scorching pain shot through her. The other cats attacked harder, trying to throw it off. Darkstorm wriggled around, failing to get free, when a dark flash bashed her to the side, taking a hard hit. Darkstorm screamed.

"*Shadeflight*!" She ran to her brother, sprawled across the ground, ignoring the stabbing pain in her leg. His eyes were closed but his flanks were moving. The blow had hit him across the eyes.

"We have to get back," Ravenfur directed, looking away. "And he needs help." She helped Darkstorm carry the grey tom back.

...

Cloudstorm sighed. "I told you, I'll tell you when I tell everyone else. Soon. They just have to finish waking u-"

"Tell them now!" Darkstorm begged. "I have to know if he'll be better! I *have* to!"Cloudstorm looked at her paws. "When we were apprentices, he got hurt badly," Darkstorm flinched at the memory. "Tallmeadow wasn't sure, at first, if he would live. But he did. He can't die now!" Cloudtorm flicked her ears.

"I'll tell Treestar to announce it."

"Now?"

"Now." The pretty white she-cat padded towards Treestar, murmuring something to softly for anyone else to hear. Treestar nodded and flicked his tail.

"Clan cats!" he yowled. They looked up, groggily heading over. "Before we start to move agai-"

"Get on with it!" Mousesong yowled.

"Then let me finish!" Treestar spat. "We all know Boltfur is dead, and Heatpelt is the new deputy. The fox patrol is fine except for Shadeflight." More cats perked their ears, intent on listening. "So how is he? Cloudstorm says," he paused. "Cloudstorm says that Shadeflight will live."

"That's not all," Cloudstorm reprimanded, just as Darkstorm's hopes climed up. "There's bad news. He will live, but he will be blind." Darkstorm felt dizzy.

"No," she whispered. "How will he be a medicine cat?" she

demanded. "How will he be *anything*?"

"Jayfeather survived," Heatpelt mewed. *He was one of the Three! From the oldest prophecy!* "So can Shadeflight. You woke us all up to tell us *this*?" she asked, looking at Treestar. He frowned.

"Cloudstorm told me to." Heatpelt rolled her eyes and walked away.

"We can continue the journey right now," Cloudstorm added. "He'll need help to walk at first, though."

"I'll help him!" Darkstorm yowled. "I will." She headed towards the medicine den. "Shadeflight. We're going to continue on the journey. Your eyes will be fine." she lied. "But for a while you won't see." She forced herself to purr. "But you'll be alright, come."

"Okay," he rasped, getting up. Darkstorm sighed silently. *What will become of the clans? There was barely any prey to be caught, but we need full bellies to travel well. And there are dangers. And now my littermate will never see again.* She choked back a wail. *It's so unfair! And I can't even help him- I have to fulfill a prophecy!* Black hate clouded her sight. *I hate this! I hate destiny! I hate ShadowClan! I hate the* prophecy*!*

Chapter Twenty-Three

Darkstorm watched as Shadeflight stumbled after the fresh-kill pile. She sighed. *Is this all he's going to be good for?* She scowled, catching Heatpelt's mocking gaze as Orangetail nudged him. "Use your scent," she suggested. Shadeflight's fur bristled.

"I know," he snapped. "I don't need help." *He's embarrassed,* Darkstorm realized. *But it's not his fault!*

"Shadeflight, come share with me," she suggested. *I'm lying,* she thought sadly as she continued. "Don't worry, your eyes will be better soon." Her guilt vanished as he nodded, smiling slightly.

"Just until then," he murmured. "I can hang on until then." The wave came rushing back. *I'm tricking him. He thinks he'll be better, but... I'm tricking my own kin! He won't be better! He'll never see again!*

"Shadeflight..." Darkstorm began. Shadeflight raised his tail.

"I've got to go." He scampered towards Amberflight, saying something. She responded cheerfully. Darkstorm watched them. *Huh. Cross-cl- why do I think that whenever two cats from different clans speak it's a cross-clan relationship? No, they're probably friends. Lots of cats are getting friends from other clans now, with this journey.*

"Cats of all clans!" Coralstar yowled. "We will move on, towards the brightest star, now."

"But this is a great camp!" a tabby screeched angrily. "We should live here!"

"Boltfur died here, and Shadeflight was blinded. This is dangerous. It might seem that there is lots of prey, but we are all skinny. And soon, the Twolegs will come here," Stonestar explained, licking her paw. "We have to find a new camp, somewhere far."

"Hmmph," the tabby growled, followed by several others. Darkstorm

bared her teeth.

"Maybe you don't want to listen to a half-clan cat, but that *was* a message! And from *StarClan*! So we will follow the brightest star until we reach the moon. And if you think the leaders shuldn't listen to me," she added, catching scornful glances, "they have their reasons, and they don't have to tell us all of them!" Treestar nodded. *He's not so mad at me anymore,* Darkstorm thought, anger showing in her snarl. *He feels* sorry *for me!*

"Whatever," a grey cat snapped.

"Slatepaw," Snarlfang mewed. A shiver ran down Darkstorm's spine. *Is she dead?* "Strikestar," he called. The ginger tom padded over to them, and they exchanged some mutters. Strikestar sighed, looking at Mousesong and Heatpelt.

"She's dead." Heatpelt's eyes widened as Mousesong's narrowed. The scarred-nose tom leaped at Snarlfang, his claws outstretched, and swiped.

"You killed her!" he roared. "You don't deserve to be a m-" As he reached in to scratch, Snarlfang struck out with his forepaw, twisting around, and then again, to pummel his opponent's muzzle. Mousesong growled, blood dripping from his mouth.

"Stop!" Strikestar yowled, his fur bristling. Mousesong rolled on his belly, surrendering, while Snarlfang stood his ground and flattened his ears. Strikestar's tail twitched. "You are ThunderClan cats, and there will be no fighting among ourselves. This is the last thing that we need. Coralstar, you must have been right to send Arrowheart away. Mousesong and Heatpelt, we will walk on, but you will bring Slatepaw's body with you and we will bury her at night, so that we can keep a vigil." His gaze softened.

"I know how you feel. You lost your kit, and I lost my sister." Mousesong bowed his head, while Heatpelt closed her eyes sadly.

"Arrowheart isn't evil!" Darkstorm snapped. She shrunk back a bit as angry gazes faced her determined one, but she didn't stop. "You may think he is, just because he loved me, but I loved him too!" she

spat, drawing back her lips in a furious snarl. "Maybe you don't want to admit, but Arrowheart isn't the only one that has broken the code." Treestar glared at her, hissing.

"Stop it, for your own g-"

"I will *not* stop!" Darkstorm screeched. All the reality hit her at once. "I am *sick* of you! I am part of that prophecy, StarClan told me! and I'm not ready for that responsibilty- I've only just turned a warrior! And beside that, I have to balance your prejustice against half-clan cats! And I lost my father, and my brother his sight! I'm leaving!" Shadeflight opened his mouth, about to speak, but she bared her teeth, her tail bristling. "And cats should be allowed to love! But you don't understand that." She quieted a bit, and then went on, "I do. I understand. So do others." Her gaze swept over the watching cats. "I love Arrowheart. I can't change that. But I should be allowed." Silence. And then...

"She's right," Orangetail mewed clearly, loudly. Snarlfang nodded, padding up towards them.

"I have feelings for Orangetail," he admitted. "But I shouldn't have to keep it a secret. So now, it is revealed." Orangetail's claws slid out, as if daring anyone to argue.

"They..." Amberflight shivered as Quickstar growled. "They're right." Comfreytail nodded, standing beside her friend. A silver she-cat and Badgerleap stepped forward. The elder was silent, walking over to her kit and sitting down, while the silver cat made a big commotion.

"But... Troutfin, you're a senior warrior! You *have* to be loyal!" an apprentice mewled. Troutfin looked at him.

"I am loyal. But I am loyal to my clan and StarClan even more than the code, and I believe that these cats speak truth. The warrior code must be changed." A grey tom stood.

"But... That's not loyalty," he spluttered. Troutfin sighed.

"I may be your mate, but you don't know me. Not well. I think that

the warrior code brings only trouble." A black cat with sky-blue eyes sniffed the air.

"Mother is right."

"Troutfin! Streamface!" Coralstar barked. Darkstorm felt heat rise in her pelt. Would Coralstar stop these cats, these cats that were so true to their clan?

"I am with you," she mewed simply. Mosstail followed her; they looked like littermates, and he probably wanted to stay with her.

"Narrowfan-"

"You're right; I don't know you. I am *loyal*, and I am ashamed of Coralstar!" Tenderleaf and Cloudstorm glared at him.

"Darkstorm is *right*!" the white she-cat snarled. "I am a medicine cat, and I will stay with her! She may not be my clan, but I would be proud if she were!" Tenderleaf nodded, and they took their place beside Darkstorm. *There are so many cats who agree,* Darkstorm thought, her hopes rising.

"I would join you," Yowltail mewed. "And I will, if Grassfang and Shadeflight will came with me. Treestar... You are good-hearted, but a mouse-brain." Treestar scowled. "I know you think you're being loyal by staying, but... It's not a good choice."

"I'm in," Grassfang dipped his head.

"So am I," Shadeflight's fur bristled. "Darkstorm, I see why you lied, but this doesn't mean I forgive you." Darkstorm closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry. You know I am. But I will *never* force you." Yowltail sighed and led Shadeflight to the gathering cats.

"I'm all of ShadowClan, now?" Treestar spat. "Then ShadowClan is no more. I am doing the same that Rowanstar once did. Will any clan take me?"

"I will," Coralstar mewed. Treestar nodded.

"Then I m now Treepool once again."

"Who else will join us?" Orangetail demanded. All at once, the cats started bickering, and a small group from each clan formed.

"Sparktail, Hardclaw, Furrypaw and I," a tom mewed. "I am Thorntail." The ThunderClan cats tried to mew farewell, but the staying cats would not let them, pushing them aside.

"Are you sure?" Strikestar mewed, regret in his eyes. Like Troutfin, Thorntail was obviously an important senior warrior. Thorntail nodded, his regret mirroring his former leader's.

"I'm sorry. But I believe that this is right."

"I will," Ravenfur mewed. "Along with Beechleap. We believe the same." Quickstar snarled.

"Good. WindClan will do *without* traitors."

"I am Shellstripe, from RiverClan," an expecting white she-cat mewed. "I'll go. I want my kits to have a free life." A mottled silver tom dipped his head.

"I won't force you to stay," he murmured lovingly, and Darkstorm concluded that they were mates. "But I can't go. We have kits here, kits that need us." He glanced at a silver apprentice. "But otherwise, I would." They touched noses briefly before parting, and realization struck Darkstorm.

These cats are giving up everything they've ever known for a chance at a better life. Her spine straightened. *I'll lead them to a good home, and we'll make a new code.* My *code.*

"Sparrownose and I will go," Featherheart spat. "Just because we agree that warriors shouldn't have a code doesn't mean we're friends, understand?" Darkstorm rolled her eyes and ignored him, until his words caught on.

"Wait," she reprimanded, "I don't think that we shouldn't have a code. I think that we should *change* it." The other cats who had joined her nodded their heads.

"We need laws," Cloudstorm mewed.

"Otherwise, everything would be chaos," Troutfin put in. "We would all die." Featherheart rolled his eyes.

"Sure, sure." *Wait,* Darkstorm realized. The air seemed to turn colder. *Could Featherheart be the apprentice?* She shook her head. *No. I was told that we know the apprentice, yes, but Featherheart... He's not really the type that would seem good for destroying us. He's strong, yes,* she thought, catching a glimpse of his rippling muscles, *but he's not* smart *enough. I'm looking for an apprentice with both. So it's either Slatepaw, she could be in the Dark Forest and come back, or Featherheart...*

...But I doubt it's either of them. I know it isn't- that would be too easy, too simple. StarClan- and GhostClan- wouldn't bother to give us clues if it were one of them. So... I don't know. It- it could *be Arrowheart, but it can't be. It just can't.*

"You aren't welcome here anymore," Stonestar mewed, her eyes narrowing. *Such a nice leader,* Darkstorm thought sarcastically. *So sought out for peace.* Coralstar bared her teeth.

"Fishstar. Treat RiverClan well." Fishstar winced.

"I will," he promised. "You can't-"

"No. I was right to banish Arrowheart, but it wasn't because he loved Darkstorm. It was because he had a great chance of being the apprentice, and destroying the clans. Darkstorm, I know you don't agree, but that's what I think."

"It's alright," Darkstorm forced herself to mew. "You can think what you want. But I won't believe it."

"What Stonestar said is true," Strikestar mewed. "I can't make you think certain things, but I give all ThunderClan cats one last chance. Do any of you want to come back?"

"Well, *SkyClan* won't be taking any traitors. To the Dark Forest with you all!" Stonestar hissed as no cat replied.

"Neither will we," Quickstar mewed. "You made your choices. Ravenfur, I'm disappointed. I thought that you would want to stay and help your clan."

"I would," Ravenfur responded tartly. "But *I* believe that this is a better way for a clan to live. WindClan, I ask *you* if any cat would like to come. Just step forward." Her gaze softened. "I hope we meet each other once again. Farewell, my clan." Her speech left Darkstorm shocked. She had so much dedication to her clan.

"Goodbye, my mentor," Fishstar mewed, twining tails with Coralstar. "My leader. My love." Coralstar sighed.

"I'll never forget you. I promise. You will live on in my memory." She licked his shoulder and they slowly parted. Darkstorm choked a sob. *Everyone has to say it...* Her eyes, surprisingly, met with Finspot's.

"I have to stay," he mewed shakily. "I wish you and your cats well, but if I go, the clans will be without a medicine cat. If I join you, I'll be a rogue."

"*What*? We're not ro-"

"You are. You aren't a clan- you're a group of rogues. But still. You used to be clan cats." He dipped his head and Darkstorm dipped hers.

"We have to go," she ordered, finding her voice. The code cats finished their goodbyes with the clan cats, and gathered behind her.

"Say something," Coralstar whispered.

"Something inspiring. These cats need it. We all just lost everything." The clancats had gone on, stealing glances behind to see the code cats, until they were too far to see. Darkstorm's gaze swept over all the cats who had followed her. *I'm still giong to save the clans. I'm still going to solve the prophecy,* she vowed to herself. *But first, these are the ones who need my help.*

"Everyone," she mewed. The ripple of faint murmurs stopped as the

cats looked to her. "We have all faced hardships, some of us more than others. Some of us are ready for this journey, some of us couldn't be less prepared." Her eyes caught on Shadeflight's scarred ones, and she looked away. "But all of us have one thing in common. We want better. We want better for ourselves, we want better for our loved ones, and we want better for our kits. This will be hard. But we *will* find a way to change the code- and it will spread and spread, until the clan cats realize that *we* are the true ones with StarClan on our side!" Cats cheered.

"But before that, we have to recognize what has happened." The cats exchanged nervous looks, Amberflight and Comfreytail laying comforting tails on Shadeflight's side. "First, we lost our home, our beautiful lake in which we have lived for so many seasons." Almost every cat closed their eyes, remembering. "And then we lost Heatpelt and Slatepaw. But this... This was the worst loss of all. We lost our clans. And you know what? It isn't our fault. It isn't theirs, either. It's nobody's. They think they are doing the right thing, we *are* doing the right thing. So at moonhigh, we will sit vigil, one night, for everything we have lost. And we will listen to the crickets and feel wind through our fur and smell rain on the way, and we will remember.

"All I ask of you is that you stay true to yourself. Your beliefs. Because we will be reunited with the clans once again, and we will change the code." She continued speaking until the sun went down and the moon shone in the sky, and the code cats curled up beside one another, watching the stars, and remembering everything that had been lost.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Darkstorm sighed, flicking her tail to summon the cats. "We need leadership," she mewed. "I'm not saying me. But we need someone to lead us, and we will be a clan."

"I can't," Coralstar mewed as several heads turned. "I'm expecting kits, and I want to be a mother that can give them everything. I can't do that properly if I'm a leader."

"Then you'll have to change your name," Beechleap mewed gently.

"Then I will. From now on, call me Coralfall."

"Coralfall. Coralfall," the name spread through the cats.

"How about anyone who wants to lead steps forward?" Darkstorm suggested. Sparrownose and Featherheart went forward immediately, slowly followed by Thorntail, Troutfin and Ravenfur. Orangetail bounded up to the rock where the other candidates were sitting, and glanced at Darkstorm.

"Hey, you come, too!" she yowled. Shadeflight pushed her forward.

"They need you," he snapped. "Even though you're a liar." *I have to do something about that...*

"I can't. I'm not..." Coralfall kinked her tail.

"You really should. You're a good leader. I mean, you have been so far."

"Treestar seemed to be, too, but almost immediately clearly wasn't," she argued. "I may not be!" But as more cats pestered her, she hesitantly got up and joined them.

"Whoever more cats want?" Coralfall asked. "I mean, let's vote. It's a weird way, but just for the first leader of this clan..."

"This is temporary," Darkstorm mewed. "Just saying." Coralfall nodded.

"There are lots of leaves," she mewed. "How about we make a pile of them, and then if one cat wants a certain leader, puts the leaf in front of them?"

"Can we vote?" Featherheart demanded.

"No. It wouldn't make a difference either way, since you'll all vote for yourselves, but still," Hardclaw answered. Featherheart rolled his eyes and sat as the code cats took their leaves.

"Is everyone done?" Cloudstorm asked. A few cats made their last decisions, and Cloudstorm began to count. "I can?" she asked.

"Yeah," Shadeflight mewed. "I mean, you're a medicine cat, so you don't take part in warrior quarrels. And maybe it's better if one cat counts... It's not like I'll be any help." He spat the last bit.

"Well, not Sparrownose," Cloudstorm mewed after a while. The tom scowled and leaped down from the light grey rock. "Not Thorntail or Ravenfur, either." Orangetail, Featherheart, Troutfin and Darkstorm perked their ears.

"And not Troutfin or Orangetail. Darkstorm and Featherheart had the most lea-"

"Darkstorm!"

"Featherheart!" the cats screeched.

"Darkstorm is fair! She's a good leader and won't lead us into unneeded fights!"

"But Featherheart is strong, and won't be afraid of the clans!"

"Neither will Darkstorm!"

"*Quiet*!" Coralfall roared. "This was a fair decision!" *But how did Featherheart get so many leaves?* Darkstorm pondered. Less than a quarter of the cats had been shouting for the once SkyClan tom.

Almost a half had been rooting for her. She brushed it aside; perhaps some cats didn't want everyone knowing their decision.

"They have the same votes," Cloudstorm mewed. Darkstorm narrowed her eyes. *How?*

"So we'll all vo-"

"StarClan." Cloudstorm looked up at the sky; there were still stars but next to none. "What should we do? Who should lead us? Please, send us a sign. Who is in your favor?"

Darkstorm held her breath, waiting.

She breathed, glancing across Silverpelt.

"They're too mad at us. They won't answer!" Cloudstorm gasped.

"Then we'll ask GhostClan!" Darkstorm exclaimed. Heads turned to her. "GhostClan is a clan of ghosts, like Tree. He's mediator among them and StarClan. We should choose a mediator, too. Maybe Tree will visit one of us."

"GhostClan," Shadeflight mewed quietly. "You are newly known to us. But you are still our ancestors, and have a say in our future. Tell us, ghosts of our kin's kin, who is our leader supposed to be?"

"StarClan is mad," Tree mewed from behind them. Darkstorm met his knowing amber gaze. "FInd out why, and we will tell you. If you cannot do such a simple thing, then maybe you don't deserve to get an answer." He blinked, walking away over the rocks and grass.

"StarClan is angry. What have we done wrong?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Snarlfang snapped.

"Because we've split up?" Darkstorm asked.

"No, mouse-brain!" Featherheart spat. "They've been mad long before that! It's because we're breaking the code!"

"No, it isn't!" Shellstripe argued. "Isn't that what we're doing right

now? I mean, the code has to change, but we *are* breaking it."

"That's not right!"

"No, it's because-"

"Snarlfang, what do you think?" Orangetail meowed.

"I *know* that it is because we depend too much on them," he explained. Darkstorm sucked in a breath, but it was Featherheart who replied.

"But... they're StarClan! They're only in Silverpelt to *help us*!" Darkstorm snarled.

"You don't know anything, do you?" she demanded. "StarClan cats were once alive, and so were GhostClan. They do not exist to help us. Each and every one of them- and us- have a different reason for existing. You'd better *shut up* right now if you think our ancesors exist to be our slaves."

"Darkstorm's right!"

"I vote Darkstorm," Coralfall mewed. "And I will not change that vote. Who-" Nearly all the cats flooded up to Darkstorm, leaving Sparrownose and Amberflight, who padded over to Featherheart.

"Well, that's pretty clear," Thorntail mewed gruffly. "Darkstar." Darkstorm backed away.

"I'm not Darkstar! I will be Darkstar if I return to ShadowClan and eventually become leader. I'm sure I'll return, but be leader... Just call me Darkstorm." Thorntail dipped his head.

"Who will be your deputy?" Streamface inquired.

"Er..." *Not Featherheart or Sparrownose. Definitively someone who wanted to be leader. I don't think Troutfin; she seems smart but not exactly a leader. A deputy, maybe, but not a leader. And I might die.* She shivered at the reality. *Orangetail is stubborn, which could be good, but I'm not sure. Maybe Thorntail, he's strong, polite and seems friendly enough. So maybe Ravenfur. She's kind, for sure, and decisive.*

"Darkstorm?" Ravenfur asked.

But Ravenfur is too accepting of everything. She needs to be a bit edgier. Usually I would say the opposite, but... this is right.

"Thorntail. Will you be deputy of-" She paused.

"DarkClan! StormClan! CodeClan!" cats shouted, and Darkstorm closed her eyes.

"Will you be deputy of-"

"*DarkClan*!" all the voices raised to join together. Sparrownose and Featherheart sat off to the side, silently watching. Sparrownose nodded slightly; he didn't care what she chose. *Wow. Maybe he'll actually listen now that I'm sort of leader. But wouldn't it be selfish to name ourselves after me?* She stared at the pleading cats. They seemed to like her and support her; they *wanted* her to name them after herself.

"...DarkClan?" Thorntail looked at her.

"I would be honored."

"I say these words before StarClan, that the spirits of our Warrior ancestors may hear and approve of my choice." *What are the next words? Uh... Think, think think...* "The new deputy of... DarkClan... is Thorntail."

"Thorntail! Thorntail! Thorntail!" *They approve of my choice.* Darkstorm felt a dizzying happiness. *Good.* She looked worriedly at Ravenfur and Troutfin, they were obvious choices, as they had responsibility. They looked glad, not minding.

"Thank you," Thorntail mewed.

"We should get going," Darkstorm mewed. "Towards the brightest star." DarkClan followed, her and Thorntail in the lead, as they began to go.

...

Darkstorm gasped, doubling over. She gathered her strength and looked back at her clan. The cats were starved; the Twolegs had reached sunrises away from the lake to haunt them, stalking where they went. "They can't keep this up much longer," Shadeflight rasped in her ear. "Neither can the rest of us."

"I know," she mewed grimly, an edge to her voice. "I'm a cat, too, you know. I also have to eat. You don't have to tell me that we have to find somewhere to stop if it's obvious." Shadeflight padded away, flicking his tail, annoyed.

"Stop it!" Coralfall spat from behind them. Darkstorm swiveled around to see Featherheart whisking a mousetail away from her and Shellsttripe.

"Why should you get to eat while the rest of us die?" the tom demanded snottily. Shellstripe scowled.

"You took prey from me, too. Coralfall have kits we need to feed, and in fact, we're taking less than *you*! We've only been taking mousetails!"

"And we've been eating last," Coralfall croaked, glaring. "I may not be a leader anymore, but I'm a queen. And queens have responsibilities."

"Yeah, right. You sneaked a whole rabbit, the two of you, when we were asleep. But *I* was watching." Sparrownose snarled at the two she-cats.

"Exactly!" Featherheart unsheathed his claws. Shellstripe backed up, glancing at herself as if thinking about her kits, and dipped her head.

"We didn't, but you can have this mousetail. We have no interest in fighting you." Featherheart lifted his chin proudly, and Darkstorm's fur bristled, about to fight.

"Wait," Thorntail mewed. His eyes glittered with intelligence as he studied the toms. "They might not hurt her." Coralfall was standing her ground, claws like jewels and teeth sharp.

"Threaten my kits, will you?" she demanded. Sparrownose hissed, walking away. Featherheart held the moustail firmly in his jaws, and he gulped it down quickly. Coralfall screeched angrily.

"What? It's not like a worthless *queen* could attack me." Coralfall was silent, and then whispered, "You wouldn't be alive if it weren't for a queen. One day you might have a mate, who might be a queen. And you may have kits, who will be queens." She glared at him and turned to continue walking.

Featherheart barreled into her side, and Darkstorm leaped, Orangetail pulling her back. "Arrowheart doesn't want you dead," she growled. "Coralfall is strong, and others will help her." Troutfin, right on cue, sprang at Featherheart. He twisted to slam his paw on her neck, throwing her down. Coralfall swished her tail angrily.

"You want to fight *me*, not Troutfin!" Featherheart tossed his head.

"You wouldn't stand a chance." He pounced on her back, dragging her down, and bared his teeth to bite her throat. The pinkish she-cat pushed up with her paws, into his underbelly, and he yowled in pain. He growled and launched, his head pointed at her belly. Darkstorm watched in horror. *He's going to kill her, and her kits!* But Coralfall rolled out of the side, slashing her claws across his throat, and he collapsed on the ground. The other cats, who had thought this was a simple quarrel, began to shout. Sparrownose rushed over to his former apprentice and peered at him.

"You killed him! You savage, savage rogue! You fox-heart!" Coralfall sidestepped as he threw himself at her, fur bristling.

"He was going to kill me."

"Stop!" Thorntail shouted, taking control. "We lost a brave warrior. Coralfall, you're right, he *was* trying to kill you, and you needed to defend yourself. So tonight we will sit vigil for him, and some of us will hunt before that. At sun-high we will continue, and all will be well." Darkstorm nodded quickly, trying to look authoritative.

"Come on, let's hunt now. Sparrownose, you stay here, and Coralfall, you come with me. Apprentices, you too. Coralfall and I

will give you a fighting lesson, as we could encounter badgers or other threats."

She sighed. *How I change the code and solve the prophecy,* she wailed inside, *if I can't even keep my clan in check? What if this is pointless? What if* I'm *the apprentice, and I've doomed us all?*

Oooh, so what do you guys think? No comments? Lots of them? This is really fun to write and I'm glad that you read this. Every day there's at least another read, and I'm just so glad that you guys vote this, too! I'm really happy, and it makes my day to know I'm giving you something to do when you're bored. If you like this, you should read 'Times of the Clans' by me; to find it, just click on my profile and scroll down to see my books. Do you guys have any comments, or constructive criticism?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-Five

"We have to go over the mountains," Grassfang mewed. Darkstorm nodded, absent-minded, staring at the towering peaks.

"There'll be eagles. As food *and* danger," Yowltail added. "Hopefully the Tribe of Rushing Water will help us." Darkstorm nodded once again.

"DarkClan," she mewed authoritatively. It's been hard since Featherheart and Beechleap died, but we have to stay strong." She closed her eyes before continuing. "Shellstripe. are your kits ready? I know they haven't even been named yet, but are they?" Shellstripe looked at her worriedly.

"They're ready, yes, but only as much as they can be. We've been moving slowly; it's only been a quarter-moon since we parted with the clans, and two sunrises since they were born!" Her mew turned to a wail. *That's true, only one has opened his eyes!* The thick-furred grey tom had light amber eyes, and the white she-kit hadn't opened hers. She was much weaker, and her littermate seemed to push her around; Darkstorm was worried.

"Mosstail, you and Amberflight help the kits. Grassfang, you help Coralst-fall," she corrected herself, "and Badgerleap, stay with Orangetail and Snarlfang." The elder snorted.

"I don't need protection. More like my kit does. Orangetail won't be able to defend herself from eagles."

"Badgerleap!" Orangetail snapped, embarrassed. This caused a ripple of good-natured laughter. Darkstorm snorted, too, as Orangetail tripped on a rock. "Uh..." she burst into laughter, and the cats began to share silly stories as they walked.

"They're hanging on," Thorntail mewed. "That's good." Darkstorm nodded.

"Everyone, we're going to begin the climb. Comfreytail, can you help Shadeflight?" Shadeflight ducked his head as Comfreytail agreed, and DarkClan started to climb. Shadeflight yelped, tripping a bit, and Comfreytail pushed him up; Shellstripe carried her she-kit, Mosstail following in case she fell, and Amberflight beside, carrying the heavier kit. Darkstorm, so focused on making sure the others were safe, lost her footing. Thorntail grabbed her scruff, and she blinked gratefully.

"Thanks," she gritted her teeth as the wind blew by them, digging her claws in deeper. *We'll change the code. We'll be allowed to have cross-clan relationships, and medicine cats will be able to have kits. Elders will be treated with more respect, and queens will eat before anyone, so that their kits are healthy.* She continued thinking abiut the new code, turning it into a mantra, as she inched higher. *Leaders will be able to be friends with other leaders, and they won't have to fight as mu-*

"*Amberflight*!" Mosstail screeched, digging his claws in her scruff. "I can't carry you and the kit!" The other cats, struggling as they were, stared back helplessly. Amberflight was slipping away, her feet scrabbling to find a foothold. Just before she fell, she tossed the kit to Mosstail.

"What happened?" Shadeflight demanded as Amberflight's screech echoed through their ears, carried on the wind. Comfreytail winced.

"She fell," the she-cat answered softly. "She couldn't have survived." Shadeflightt went on stiffly, in horror, and the cats were silent.

"She died like a warrior," Darkstorm mewed. "Fighting for the code, and giving her life for a kit's. She could've tossed him down, and let you take her, but she didn't." Mosstail let out a shrill mew. As they reached the top, Shellstripe licked her tom's ears.

"I know what his name will be," she decided. "He will be called Amberkit, in memory of the cat who gave her life for him." DarkClan began to murmur his name, and Mosstail nodded.

"It's a good name. We will remember her by him." Shellstripe sighed.

"The she-kit will be Duskkit." Darkstorm flicked her tail for attention.

"So we have two new cats with us: Duskkit and Amberkit! We'll find a place to sleep and sit vigil for Amberflight. She was a good friend and a brave cat." Darkstorm sniffed the air, wondering what the scent was, when Thorntail let out a warning yowl.

"Eagle!" Shellstripe grabbed Amberkit. Duskkit let out a squeal as the eagle dove for her, claws outstretched. Shellstripe screeched as the eagle grabbed her kit, and pounced on it's back. Darkstorm rushed over to help, but the eagle was carrying Shellstripe away.

"*No*!" she shouted, jumping up and digging her claws in the eagle's wing. It cawed and threw her off, flying awkwardly but higher. She fell with a thud, and leaped again. The eagle was too high. "No... We lost Beechleap and Amberflight, and Featherheart! *We can't lose you too*!" A second eagle was circling them, and Thorntail grabbed her, dragging her back. Hardclaw got Duskkit, who was alive on the ground, and took her to Amberkit.

"Get along," he ordered. *He doesn't know how to deal with kits.*

"We'll bring you a mousetail later if your still and don't fight," she promised shakily. The kits nodded and she looked at DarkClan. "Shellstripe's-" she glanced at the kits, who were cocking their heads.

"Where's Mama?" Duskkit asked.

"She's... sleeping," Coralstar murmured, licking the kit's ruffled fur. Darkstorm sighed.

"There was nothing we could do. It was the eagle," Badgerleap mewed. Darkstorm looked at the sky.

"We have to-"

"Who are you?" a gruff voice belonging to a mud-covered tom demanded.

"Flower!" Yowltail mewed. "It's me!"

"Yowltail? Who are all these?"

"DarkClan... It's a long story. But we need shelter." Flower flicked his tail, deciding to trust them.

"Come. It smells like eagle here." They followed him through a path of ferns until they reached a clearing. Then they turned and continued to find a waterfall. "Stoneteller!" Flower barked. "May I come?"

"Yes," a she-cat's voice replied. They followed the tom behind the waterfall, into a cave, and saw a pale ginger she-cat. "Who are these cats?"

"DarkClan. They need shelter.." Flower trailed off, confused. "I'm not completely sure, but this is Yowltail." Stoneteller dipped her head in a greeting. "And Grassfang, Hardclaw, Thorntail and Troutfin."

"We are DarkClan," Darkstorm explained. "I'm Darkstorm. The clans... Are leaving." She left out the part about the code and the prophecy, keeping it simple and not revealing too much. "For good. We are traveling over the moutains, not in the direction of the old territory, but to the side. We need to stay somewhere and keep vigil for Amberflight," she lowered her voice, "and Shellstripe, these kit's mother."

"Amberflight... The cheerful she-cat that came once," Stoneteller recalled. "There are kits with you? Stay, but only for a night. I am sorry, but we need our territory, now that The Time of Frozen Water is coming."

"Leaf-bare," Flower clarified. "I think that's what you call it." They were led to a cave of food and then to sleeping dens; they kept unsocial as anyone could be a threat. Darkstorm yawned, her belly full for the first time in moons.

I'm not *the apprentice. StarClan would have warned me. And I think we're right about why StarClan is mad; we depend on them too much. Until we reach the moon, we won't contact them. We have to think for ourselves.* She closed her eyes sleepily. *I think StarClan believes in me. They know I can do it. I can solve the prophecy.* Her expression grew

determined; she had faced death in the eye when she had climbed the mountain, she had faced courage n the eye when she left the clans, and she had looked determination in the eye for her whole life. *I'm the 'shadows', and I will save the clans!*

That's good, she thinks she can save the clans. But do you think you know who the apprentice is? I wouldn't cross her off the list... Just because she tries to be good doesn't mean she is. But then again, wouldn't it? Not very helpful, I know. Sorry! I know the cover isn't great and I'm still taking cover creations. Wow, you've given me a *lot* to choose from. For now, I'll just keep this, but after I'll go over them and see what fits. But I like the name I decided, 'Darkstorm's Code'. Do you?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-Six

Amberkit sighed loudly and took a swipe at Duskkit, who lunged back in pain. Darkstorm hissed at them. "Stop it!" she ordered. "We are near our destination, I can feel it. But I don't want anyone else dying or getting hurt, do you hear me?" Duskkit nodded.

"Okay, sorry," she mewled. Amberkit said nothing, giving his littermate a glare.

"You haven't even opened your eyes yet. You can't make promises!" Duskkit flattened her white ears.

"I know, I know!" she wailed, and Darkstorm instantly felt ashamed. *I'm too harsh, they're just kits!* "I know. It's been several moon-highs since we were born. And Mama isn't back yet, she's still asleep." Amberkit snorted.

"Do you know what dead means?" he asked, flicking his claws in and out. *I have to sto- I can't. They have to know sooner or later, and if I try to stop Amberkit, Duskkit will know something is up. Wait... how does Amberkit know what death is? And does he know that Shellstripe is dead?* A furious amber gaze entered her mind, and she shoved it aside. *He wouldn't do that.* She watched silently, regretfully, as Amberkit went on.

"Dead means that a cat is asleep, and will never wake up." Amberkit giggled, and closed her eyes.

"I'm dead, I'm dead! New game! Coralfall's kits will play it with us when they're born, too!" Amberkit snarled.

"Mouse-brain! Our *Mama* is dead! There are ways to die, of old age, of sickness, or of someone- or something- killing you." He stalked closer to the frightened kit. "An eagle killed her."

"You mean... She'll really never-"

"She's *dead, Stupidkit*!" Amberkit yowled, lashing his tail angrily. "And it's *their* fault!" He swept his tail again, gesturing to the gathering cats. "They didn't save her!" Duskkit stepped back, stumbling into the wall, and Darkstorm remembered that she was less than a moon old.

"Is it true?" Duskkit squeaked, sniffing at Darkstorm. She sighed.

"Yes. Your mother is dead. But it isn't anyone's fault," the black she-cat added quickly. "And we care about you. You're not alone." Duskkit scrambled back, her eyes peeling open. Darkstorm scrambled back now. The kit's eyes had two colours, and ones unheard of in cats. They were each blue-violet, with silver specks. Duskkit batted at her face suddenly.

"It hurts!" she yowled, her fur spiking. "It hurts! It burns!" Shadeflight rushed over, sniffing her.

"Something's wrong." He swiped a cobweb from an old tree and put it on her eyes, licking them closed. *He's still a medicine cat, even without his sight,* Darkstorm realized. She shook her head; this wasn't the time.

"It hurts,"

"Does this help?" Shadeflight put more cobwebs and applied pressure, and Duskkit darted back.

"No!" she screeched. "It hurts! Stop it! Help me!" Coralfall sucked in a breath and ran to the white she-kit, licking her eyes open. "That's good," Duskkit breathed. Coralfall suddenly yowled, doubling over, and Mosstail licked her head.

"Coralfall?" His mew rose in horror. "Coralfall!" She was panting and screeching.

"Her kits," Snarlfang mewed. "They're too early!" He and Cloudstorm heaved her up behind a tree, away from the staring cats.

"She needs her privacy, let's go," Thorntail ordered. Darkstorm picked up Duskkit in her teeth, and Thorntail took Amberkit.

...

"It's alright," Shadeflight murmured. He had gone to take water for Coralfall and was returning from the tree. "Coralfall will live, and as will three of her kits. There... were four. A tom." Darkstorm gasped and rushed to the queen, who was licking her kits.

"I'm so sorry," she mewed, her heart breaking. "He should've lived!" Coralfall was silent, licking her kits. "You didn't deserve this. He didn't deserve this."

"Finkit was killed," Coralfall spat suddenly. "We thought he would die, but he hung on, and I looked away to see the rest of my kits for the first time. When I looked back, his throat had been slit." Darkstorm's jaw dropped.

"*What*? A *cat* killed him? He didn't just die?" Coralfall nodded slightly, staring off into the distance.

"I won't let these kits die. My other one, Weedpaw, did. That stinking otter. These *won't* die!" she repeated forcefully, snarling. "Whoever killed Finkit *will* die!"

Who would kill an innocent kit? Who hates Coralfall so much? An amber gaze filled her mind again, and she sighed. *It's not him. Is it?*

"This is Fishkit," Coralfall announced to the clan four sun-downs later.

"For Fishstar," a cat breathed.

"Let Fishstar be remembered. He probably would've come..."

"RiverClan needed a leader."

Fishkit, a brown-and-silver tom, squealed and licked his paw. Coralfall gently nosed a red tom ahead of her, continuing. "This is Riverkit, in memory of the old RiverClan." The blue-eyed ginger-and-brown tom ruffled his pelt. "It had it's flaws, but my clan was honorable and proud. May we cross paths again." The former RiverClan cats dipped their heads, murmuring quietly. "One of my kits died. He was called Finkit, for our brave medicine cat Finspot.

He stayed because StarClan knew it was the right thing to do."

"Good names," Troutfin commented. "These kits will help us remember."

"And my last kit, a she-kit, will be Starkit." Gasps rose from DarkClan.

"*Star*kit?"

"A compliment or not?"

"An insult to StarClan!"

"Is she one day to be called Starstar? She'll be shunned!"

"A disgrace!"

"Beautiful!"

"Suits her, with such a star-coloured silver pelt."

"Those kits are adorable, but Starkit? What kind of n-"

"Coralfall's kits are an honor to be in our clan! Starkit will grow up to be a great cat!" Darkstorm screeched. Amberkit and Duskkit nodded.

"New kits! Yay!" Amberkit sat down, studying Starkit, while Duskkit ran around them. Coralfall glared at the angry cats.

"Starkit is my kit. Harm her, and you will see what happens. Kits, Amberkit and Duskkit too, come. You need milk. One day you will all be heroes."

Coralfall has... A lot of expectations for her kits. Hmm... Who do you think killed Finkit? Do you like the names Riverkit, Duskkit, Starkit, Finkit, Amberkit, and Fishkit? I juggled with calling one of them Dustkit, actually. I know a lot of Warriors fans don't like Dustpelt too much, and I don't love him as an apprentice, but after that he becomes one of my favourite characters. I'll probably name a kit Dustkit if there's another in

this book, because I did *not* want Dustpelt to die. I feel that no one gave hime a lot of attention in real life, not the books. Not even Erin Hunter- he was just a character to not like and who died a pointless death. Rowanstar didn't even want to accept help, so they should have just let it be- he would've agreed eventually, and the other clans could help, and Dustpelt wouldn't have to die. Hmm. That's a long rant about an unliked character, but too bad! I like him! (Now, going on. The next chapter!)

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Darkkit batted her paws at the butterfly, carefree and happy. "Shadekit! Come play with me!" the kit ordered, acting like a leader already. Her littermate bounded over in a few strides, looking at her eagerly.

"Are we going to play Catch the Pine cone? Chase butterflies? Or are we going to listen to a story?"

"Let's play Clan, and Orangekit will, too! And Thinfur!" Shadekit got Thinfur while Darkkit got Orangekit.

"Clan?" Orangekit's eyes sparkled mischievously. "Who's leader?"

"Me!" Darkkit squealed. "Shadekit, who do you want to be?"

"I'll be medicine cat!"

"Okay!" Darkkit wondered why he would choose not to fight, but brushed it aside. "Orangekit, will you be my deputy?" Orangekit nodded. "And Thinfur the warrior!"

"Watch out!" Orangekit mewed, leaping onto the younger kit's back. Darkkit let out a mew. "I'm leader now!" the ginger she-kit announced, pinning Darkkit to the ground.

"But I have nine *lives!" Darkkit swiped Orangekit's nose with sheathed paws. Orangekit snorted and replied, "Then let's hunt! Thinfur, you'll be in the patrol with Dark*star *and I. Shadekit, you come in case we hurt ourselves!" Darkkit smiled proudly. One day she* would *be Darkstar! She raced after the cats.*

"Our leader's too slow!" Thinfur yowled. "She'll never make it! SkyClan is on our side of the border!" They stopped at the edge of the camp, pretending to bat away SkyClan warriors.

"Victory!" Darkkit cried. "SkyClan is defeated, and ShadowClan rules the pine forest!"

...

"Darkpaw. Darkpaw, wake up. Today we'll learn hunting techniques," Fernstar mewed. This was one of her good days, and Darkpaw was happy to train. "Although fighting is important, hunting is an essential skill for a warrior."

"What will you name me? What will my warrior name be, when I pass my assessment?"

"There are still four moons. Right now, focus on stalking. Try not to alert me that you're here while we go to the forest."

"But you already kno-"

"Still, it's good practice," her mentor and leader hissed. "You will stalk me." Darkpaw obeyed, putting her weight on her haunches and slowly moving forward. Careful not to step on any twigs, she let her tail lie low. She swiveled her head around quietly, as if checking for any intruders, before turning back to Fernstar and balancing herself. "We're here. Be more careful; your breathing was loud. Your feet, though, were silent. That's good. But breathing can give away your hiding place, understand?" Darkpaw nodded.

"Okay. Do you think there's a toad or something?" Fernstar shrugged.

"Why would I know? We're low on prey, but you won't actually be hunting *until later. Show me your stalking crouch." Darkpaw nodded and relaxed herself, again putting her weight on her haunches after moving downwind of Fernstar.*

"Is this good?" Fernstar sniffed her apprentice.

"Yes, but this is more side-wind than downwind. Move more..." Fernstar pushed Darkpaw to the side a bit, and then continued, "this is good. Now, remember where the wind is blowing when you're hunting. Stalk forward for me, pretend this pine cone is your prey." She gestured with her tail to a fallen pine cone. Darkpaw moved forward in a smooth, quiet motion. Getting closer to ensure proper kill, she pounced and swiped the pine cone with her claws.

"It would be a bit different depending on the animal," Darkpaw mewed.

"But was that alright?" Fernstar made a sweeping motion with her tail.

"Yes, it was alright. Now, climb as high as you can... That tree." Darkpaw cocked her head.

"Why? We're not SkyClan, not even ThunderClan!"

"You must have a basic knowledge, just in case. Now, climb." Darkpaw sunk her claws into the tree. It was soft, and she was careful not to go on thin branches as she scaled it. She looked down with a yelp.

"I'm so high! Can I come down?" Fernstar flicked her tail and Darkpaw scrambled to get off the tree. It wasn't natural, she thought, to climb trees. How could ThunderClan and SkyClan stand it? But then again, how could RiverClan stand swimming, and WindClan the cold winds of the moor? She sighed. The other clans weren't understandable, they were simply weird. She was thankful she would never have to work with them. After all, weren't the clans supposed to be enemies?

...

Darkstorm yawned as she patrolled the borders. No cat had intruded. "Let's hunt. More prey can't hurt," she suggested. Grassfang and Yowltail nodded.

"I'll go there," Yowltail nodded in the direction of the Pine Stump and took off. Grassfang snorted good-naturedly.

"There's only so much prey to be found, especially with the Twolegs. I'll go to the Dead Tree, why don't you go to the Violet Swamp." Darkstorm nodded and padded away.

The Violet Swamp was called what it was called because of the beautiful water lilies that sprouted in it. The water was also slightly clearer than the other swamps, and many animals drank there. There weren't many toads, though, most likely for the same reason. The black pelted warrior stayed in the shadows, slowly stalking forward. She suddenly remembered the hunting lesson she once had with Fernstar. She missed Fernstar. Although the old ShadowClan leader hadn't been fair to her, things were so much less confusing, and she was loyal to her clan. Treestar had changed drastically since given the name 'star', and she was

even less fond of him than Fernstar, as she had actually known *him when he was well-liked.*

A scent filled her nose and she crouched, pinning the rat with her eyes. It was small, but it would have to be a quick kill. If bitten, her wound could quickly get infected and she could die. This was unlikely, but she wouldn't take her chances. She silently unsheathed her claws and bared her teeth. There could be more, hiding in the tall grass.

It was nibbling the root of a water lily. She planned a route and prowled through the flower-dotted grass, stopping as the scent of more rats filled her nose. About five, she guessed. Her choices were to try herself to catch it, which was dangerous, leave them, or get help. She chose the third one and found Yowltail and Grassfang, bringing them to the swamp. "Did you catch anything?"

"No," Yowltail sighed.

"Let's catch these, then," Grassfang mewed. Darkstorm led the senior warrior and deputy to the group of rats.

"Here." The cats struck out in unison, catching one rat and scaring the others. Darkstorm herded a stray one into the group, and the ShadowClan warriors moved in. Ine scratched her nose, but she caught it, and helped Yowltail get one. Grassfang killed the rest.

"They were weak," Grassfang murmured. "Barely put up a fight. But hey, we got prey! Let's head back." Darkstorm nodded.

"And there was no clan stealing it. That's good. Everyone has stopped going across our borders. But we'd better be careful..." Yowltail finished for her.

"We never know when they'll strike."

...

"Hey, Darkstorm! We have to move. Wake up!" Thorntail mewed. Darkstorm jolted awake, confusion filling her eyes.

"It was ShadowClan..." *Memories,* she realized sadly. A wave of despair washed through her. One memory as a kit, then an

apprentice, and finally a warrior. She wished she could fall asleep again and let all her troubles fade away.

"You had bad dreams?"

"Sad ones. Actually, happy ones, but in ShadowClan, so sad ones, really. Each one ended with me not trusting the other clans..."

"You're here now, and we're following the brightest star. That's what matters." Darkstorm nodded, rolling over and heaving to her paws.

"DarkClan! We'll move on now." The cats followed her, but Darkstorm barely noticed. *I thought the other clans were terrible. Now, tragedy has stuck us together. But... Was this a message from StarClan? What...*

What will happen when the tragedy is gone?

Okay, I'm sorry if this was a boring chapter. But I not everything can have death or battles in it. I actually liked this. We got peeks at Darkstorm's past, and how much has changed. It's sort of sad, to see the main character's happy memories and then what's really happening to her. And now she's started thinking about after.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Twenty-Eight

[image]

Darkstorm shook her head, confused. DarkClan was temporary; eventually the cats *would* go back to their clans, and there wouldn't be anything to do to stop them. If one of their leaders declared war, then... Then they would fight. She shivered. All these cats had made new friends and new kin. Would it all end when they found the clans?

"I smell cats," Orangetail mewed, narrowing her eyes. "A group of them, but not ones that we know. Wait a minute... Is that..."

"Thinfur!" Shadeflight cried, breathing in the scent. "It's our father, Darkstorm!" Darkstorm decided that she had been forgiven, and padded over to him.

"Yes," she agreed, recognizing the smell. "It's him. And..." she trailed off. *It can't be... Could it? Is it really him?*

"Arrowheart," Coralfall stepped closer to her kits. "The apprentice, now a warrior. Did I doom all clans to name him a warrior?" Darkstorm bared her teeth.

"No! He's good. If anything, he's just mistaken." Duskkit looked up at her, along with Starkit. Fishkit and Riverkit were playing with each other, while Amberkit was sitting down beside Starkit.

"Let's find them," Fishkit mewed happily. "The lost warriors!"

But if they followed the scents, what would happen? Darkstorm stared at her cats. Caring Coralfall, determined Hardclaw, wise Troutfin, dedicated Comfreytail, bright Streamface, inspiring Cloudstorm, quiet Tenderleaf, loyal Yowltail, helpful Grassfang, amusing Badgerleap, fearless Orangetail, intelligent Shadeflight, decisive Thorntail, happy Bushpaw, careful Mosstail, cheerful Sparktail, trusting Ravenfur, mysterious Snarlfang, quick-thinking Sparrownose, little Duskkit, bold Amberkit, odd Starkit, playful

Fishkit, calm Riverkit. They all trusted her, from the kits to former leaders. Would it be fair to lead them into battle? At first she hadn't known a single thing about them at first, and now... Now she felt that they all depended on each other, and if one more cat died, she didn't know what they would do.

"Is it fair..." she murmured to herself. She wanted to find them. She *needed* to find them. But was it really fair to DarkClan? Arrowheart and Thinfur could've been captured by this group of cats; it could be rogues or just a pack of homeless kittypets. But she needed to find them... She felt a comforting tail on her shoulder and looked to see Thorntail. A cloud of doubt filled her mind as she smelled the spiky-furred warrior's sweet scent. Was Arrowheart really meant for her? But as Thorntail's scent mingled with Arrowheart's, she knew that it wasn't true. She loved Arrowheart, there was no doubt about it. But were there *two* cats that had fallen for her?

"Find him," Thorntail mewed. "Find Thinfur." *He's not mentioning Arrowheart...*

"My clan," Darkstorm mewed. "I *do* want to find them. No matter what you think, Arrowheart is loyal." She knew that they aall wanted Thinfur back; he was brave and kind, and his only flaw was to love a WindClan cat, which they didn't care about. "But I can't go, not if you don't agree. What do you say?"

"You have risked your life for us," Coralfall mewed. "You have braved eagles and mountains."

"So have you," Darkstorm argued.

"But you have done it with the weight- the weight of leadership. Which is hard. I may not agree aboit Arrowheart, but you deserve this. I say, we go." Other cats nodded, murmuring things, while Sparrownose was silent.

"Fine," he muttered. "I don't care."

"Sparrownose," Darkstorm mewed, "you're a member of DarkClan. What do you *really* think?"

"I think this is stupid!" Sparrownose lashed out with his claws, tearing a leaf and growling. "The warrior code has to be changed, but what are *you* doing about it? Featherheart *died* because of your so precious clan member, and no one has been punished! You *excuse* for a leader, you otter-heart! You *fox-heart*!" He yowled to the sky, flattenening his ears. "Coralfall has to die! She took the life of my Clanmate!"

"She *is* your clanmate,"

"No, she's not! She's a *murderer*! Finkit *deserved* to die, the pathetic kit! Everything to make Coralfall's heart break! She doesn't know how it *feels*! You're all *mad*, just mad! I don't need you! I don't need everyone! If I care about someone, they'll die, just like Flowershine! Just like Talonkit and Birdkit! Just like Shadeflight, the first one, the one that cared!" Sparrownose's eyes filled with grief. "Everyone dies... Everyone... Coralfall should never have been born..." He tightened his grip on the shredded leaf. "I'm glad I killed Finkit." *He knew Shadeflight?*

"You killed him!" Coralfall howled, leaping at him. "*You killed my kit*!" Her teeth flashed red as she bit his shoulder. His eyes narrowed, and he didn't move.

"Yes, I did. Are you going to kill me, too? You're the killer. You killed Featherheart and Flameclaw. And your beloved *Streamface* killed Flowershine... And *Mosstail* my kits. You and your kin are just killers." Coralfall snarled.

"We are honourable! Mosstail killed no kits! Streamface only did because *Flowershine* attacked her!" Sparrownose endured the blows, watching Coralfall's kits with unemotional eyes.

"Ask Mosstail if you're so sure." Coralfall bared her teeth, about to bite him again, when Mosstail pushed forward.

"Wait, I did," he mewed. "I destroyed a SkyClan den. I thought I heard a yowl as it fell. Birdkit and Talonkit- they were under it, weren't they?" Sparrownose didn't answer.

"And Streamface lied. She killed Flowershine with no reason."

"I killed Flowershine because she insulted me, and scratched me! At a *gathering*!" Streamface retorted. Darkstorm froze.

"You killed a cat because they *scratched* you?" Coralfall demanded.

"It was a gathering! And they insulted me, too! Also, she took one of your lives. Not then, but before. She deserved to die that night!"

"Do I care? I was a leader with nine lives. A cat scratched you at a gathering. So you *killed* them at a gathering?"

"I didn't kill her *at* the gathering," she defended herself. "I killed her on the way *back* from the gathering."

"Get *out* of here!" Coralfall roared. "I am ashamed to call you kin!"

"Hey, hey," Mosstail snapped. "Come on, she was only an apprentice when it happened. And Flowershine was half-dead already, after fighting a badger."

"You *knew*?" Coralfall slashed his muzzle. "Both of you, *leave*!"

"We- we're littermates-"

"I thought I knew you," Coralfall interrupted with a murderous glare. "You will leave, or I will kill you!" Mosstail backed away, Streamface following him as he darted away. Sparrownose glanced at Coralfall's kits, and then the pink she-cat.

"Are you going to kill me now? Flowershine was my mate. Your littermate killed her. Birdkit and Talonkit were my kits. Streamface killed them. Are you going to do the same to me?"

Coralfall's eyes darkened.

Sparrownose held her icy gaze.

"No. I will uphold my kin's honor." Sparrownose looked down.

"I'm sorry for killing Finkit. I was driven with rage- all your kin has done is kill mine. And my friend." *Fernstar killed Shadeflight, my once-leader his friend. That's why he hates me. And it's clear why he*

hates Coralfall, Darkstorm thought. *All I did was think he was evil.*

"Are you going to let him stay?" Thorntail asked quietly. Darkstorm took a deep breath.

"Sparrownose, I must apologize. I haven't treated you well. You shouldn't have killed Finkit, but then again, Coralfall shouldn't have killed Featherheart. He shouldn't have attacked her, either. You were mad. So I don't know what to do. Coralfall, you are the one he has offended. Will you let him stay?" Coralfall sighed.

"It's the least I can do. But kill one more of my kits, and *you'll* be the one with a slit throat." Sparrownose dipped his head.

"And we will change the code, Sparrownose. But first, StarClan has given us a task, which we must fulfill." Sparrownose looked away, as if agreeing with her, but too proud to admit it. "DarkClan. We have lost two warriors. But do not fear for us. We will follow the scent, which leads in the direction of the brightest star, and hopefully gain two warriors." She hid her doubts that it would be so easy. She was a leader now; she had to be confident.

"Let's go," Comfreytail mewed. "Sparrownose, *I* forgive you."

"So do I," Ravenfur added, echoed by the other cats.

The kits were silent.

"We have to follow the scent trail," Starkit mewled out of the blue. "StarClan wants us to, we must."

She's too solemn for a kit. It scares me...

"Sparrownose," Amberkit meowed sternly, "don't try to hurt us, or I'll hurt you. Okay?" Sparoownose nodded sheepishly; a *kit* was telling him off? Darkstorm stared into the distance. Arrowheart awaited her.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

[image]

Darkstorm padded through the small forest, her clan trailing behind her. Although the forest was beautiful, it held little prey, and therefore wasn't meant to be their new home. Darkstorm froze. "Look," she whispered. A tuft of dark grey fur had caught on a thorny bush.

"That's Arrowheart's," Orangetail guessed. "Isn't it?" The black she-cat nodded.

"We're... close." Thorntail flicked his ear. "There are a *lot* of cat scents." Darkstorm nodded again.

"Arrowheart's. And Thinfur's," Shadeflight stepped in front of them. "They're really, really near here." Darkstorm bounded after the scent, once again her clan following. Her ears perked up and she skidded to a stop.

"Thinfur!" she and Shadeflight yowled, hearing familiar footsteps and smelling a familiar scent. Thinfur came dashing out of the bushes.

"You're here," he meowed. "You're here!" The two littermates nuzzled their father happily, purring.

"Where were you?" Shadeflight asked.

"By myself. Why?"

"Arrowheart got banished, too!" Darkstorm explained. "You didn't see him?" Thinfur shook his head, licking hers.

"No. But you'll find him. My kits are resourceful. What's this?" He flicked his tail at DarkClan. Darkstorm looked up at him.

"My- my clan. DarkClan. Our deputy is Thorntail. We're the cats who want to change the code." Thinfur's eyes locked with

Sparrownose's, and they glared at each other. "Stop, Thinfur!" Darkstorm protested. "We forgave him, we forgave Sparrownose. Even Coralfall after Finkit."

"You... have to catch me up on everything." Darkstorm blinked and gazed at her clan.

"Patrols," she muttered.

"Tenderleaf, Sparktail, Hardclaw and Troutfin, hunt?" Thorntail asked. The chosen cats scampered off. "Ravenfur, lead Grassfang, Orangetail and Bushpaw and scout the area. We'll make a camp here for the night. The rest of you, gather moss. Yowltail, can you and Snarlfang go for herbs and water?" Again, the chosen cats left in their patrols. Thinfur yawned. "I'll go help with the moss." Darkstorm watched him pad away.

"So Darkstorm got fed up and finally spoke *against* the leaders," Shadeflight began excitedly. "And so then she said she was leaving, and a bunch of cats went with her." Thinfur's eyes narrowed.

"Wait. What- what happened to your eyes?" Darkstorm took over as Shadeflight quieted.

"Well, before we left, we fought two dog foxes. Strong ones. One scratched Shadeflight's eyes, and we couldn't help him. I... I lied and said that he would be able to see again one day. I shouldn't have, but I didn't want him to always be miserable. I tried to give him hope."

"I was mad. I'm sorry," Shadeflight mewed solemnly. "I was worried."

"Go on," Thinfur encouraged. Darkstorm flattened her ears.

"Beechleap died. He was old- he couldn't take the journey." Thinfur winced. "And then Featherheart attacked Coralfall- she's Coralfall now, even though I'm not Darkstar. He tried to kill her, but she ended up killing *him*." His eyes widened. Darkstorm watched his expression as she continued.

...

Darkstorm blinked and got up. Thinfur had reacted well to the news. She took a mouse and padded over to Snarlfang and Orangetail. "Share?"

"Sure." The three cats chewed the mouse slowly, nourishing the delicacy. Darkstorm sniffed the air and heaved to her paws.

"The cats we scented,"she hissed. "DarkClan!" she yowled, glimpsing white fur behind a bush. "We're under attack!" The clan scrambled to their paws. A white-and-grey tom stepped out from behind the bush.

"You saw me." Darkstorm raised her hackles as he spoke. His green eyes glinted like Twoleg silverthorn.

"Who are you?" she demanded. The tom blinked.

"I'm Cometstar." Several cats slunk to his side. "This is MoonClan. Our deputy is Moonglow." A white she-cat lifted her head proudly. "Why are you in our forest? You're obviously a clan." Darkstorm's eyes narrowed.

"We are DarkClan," she explained curtly, holding his gaze. *There's another clan?* "We'll be out of your territory now. We hadn't known it to be yours. Maybe freshen your scent markers." Cometstar's nose flared.

"You're another of those petty warrior-code-clans, aren't you?" His claws, silver like moonbeams, ricocheted against the stone he was sitting on. His cats unsheathed theirs, baring their teeth.

"We're not, actually," Darkstorm retorted, her clan mirroring his. She tapped her claws on the dirt. "We're DarkClan, and we left the clans because of their *petty code*." she sneered, her voice like his. "We're going. Either you'll let us go in peace, and we'll never see each other again, or we'll fight, and DarkClan will win." More cats padded out of the shadows. *There are a lot... But we still outnumber them.* She glared at Cometstar.

"We aren't scared of you!" Her lips peeled back in a snarl. "Will you really lead your clan into a fight that you'll surely lose?"

"Surely?" Cometstar spat. "*I* think that *we'll* be the ones who 'surely win'!" Darkstorm glared at him. "MoonClan, *attack*!" Darkstorm flung herself onto Cometstar's shoulders, clawing his back. He ran. *What kind of trick...* Comfreytail sped after him, faster as she originated from WindClan.

"Give up!" Darkstorm snarled, as Comfreytail pinned Cometstar down and batted his muzzle. The black cat ran to help Bushpaw, who was struggling with three much older warriors. They had knocked Orangetail over, which was surprising, given the young warrior's determination and strength. A third warrior, the one that was slashing a claw across Bushpaw's belly, was the one who had been trying to attack Orangetail. Snarlfang leaped over and helped Bushpaw, while Darkstorm held off the two bigger warriors. One was a lithe tabby tom, and the other a silver tom. The she-cat Bushpaw and Snarlfang were attacking was yellow, with white paws.

The tabby bit Darkstorm's tail with a surprising strength for one so skinny, while the silver tom sliced at her muzzle and raced off to help a smaller brown and white she-cat. Darkstorm ducked a hard blow and slammed the top of her muzzle to the tabby's belly.

"Speckledfur! Help!" a black tom yowled. Speckledfur, the tabby, narrowed his eyes at Darkstorm.

"Hang on a few heartbeats. Gingerheart, can you help Nightpaw?" He launched himself at Darkstorm, biting her paw and leaping beside Nightpaw and an orange tom. Darkstorm clamped her teeth on Orangetail's scruff and dragged her to a leafy tree. She winced, licking her bloody paw.

"Orangetail!" Snarlfang screeched, stopping at her side. "Darkstorm, bring cobwebs. And you know how marigold looks, yes?" Darkstorm nodded quickly, remembering picturing a frilly orangish flower in her mind. "Find that, too!" Darkstorm raced into the forest, finding cobwebs under a dead bush. She rolled it up into a wad and stuck it under her chin, her head pinning it to her chest. She continued looking for marigold until she found it, holding it in her mouth and running as fast as she could back to Snarlfang.

"I have it!" she yowled, stopping as she reached Snarlfang. "Wha... What happened?" MoonClan was gone.

"We won," Snarlfang explained. "They left."

"But-" A horrible thought entered her mind. "What if they were the moon we had to find?"

"About that." Snarlfang snatched the marigold and cobwebs from her. "StarClan visited me in a dream. Actually, Spottedleaf did. She was once a ThunderClan medicine cat." Darkstorm's ears twitched. "She said that the 'moon' was the place where we would have to leave new cats behind. She said these 'new cats' were a clan- they were supposed to be one, but beside breaking the code, they abandoned StarClan. She said I would know who these cats would be when I met them- they're MoonClan.

"She also said that once we've found the moon, our journey isn't done. We'll stop when we find the clans, again in the direction of the brightest star, and journey a bit after that."

"And then?" Darkstorm prompted. Snarlfang shrugged.

"I don't know. She didn't say."

"No, Brambleberry said that after that, we would reunite with the clans! Maybe. She said *maybe*, maybe, maybe maybe. Maybe is fun to say!" Starkit chirped suddenly, rolling in the grass. "And *maybe* the code will be changed, the warrior code!" Duskkit frowned.

"Yeah, but Yellowfang said that ShadowClan and RiverClan would have new medicine cat apprentices soon. And that *maybe* we would find a new home?" Darkstorm froze.

"You... you two *spoke* with Yellowfang and Brambleberry?" Shadeflight demanded. Duskkit shrugged.

"Yeah, they also let us play with a gray and white kit. She was so friendly! I think her name was Mosskit?"

"Yeah, she was a ThunderClan cat, I think?" Starkit added. Duskkit

nodded.

"That's what the blue cat said. They had stars in their fur! It was so pretty! Do I have stars in my fur?" Duskkit purred.

"No! Open your eyes and you can see for yourself!" Starkit sniffed herself.

"In that place, I *did* see!"

The kits tumbled after one another, playing, and the other kits joined them. Darkstorm watched them.

"Starkit has to be a RiverClan medicine cat," Coralfall mewed. "No doubt about it. And Duskkit... Maybe a ShadowClan medicine cat? I mean, RiverClan and ShadowClan will have new medicine cats, yes? That's what StarClan said."

"Yes," Shadeflight mewed slowly. Snarlfang growled.

"Those kits must be. Look, it's nothing to be over ourselves about. They're meant to be medicine cats, that's all. And we knew that we would be reunited with the clans- at least we hoped." Thorntail mewed something. Darkstorm blinked, and walked over to Orangetail, who had been given cobwebs and was stretching.

"Orangetail. You must be out of practice," Darkstorm joked. "Being beaten!" Orangetail snorted. "Arrowheart wasn't here. But he must be nearby. I mean, we scented hi-"

"Help!" Yowltail's screech interrupted her, and Darkstorm bouded over to her, shocked to see a limp shape. "It's Grassfang! Grassfang- he's dead!"

Chapter Thirty

Shadeflight ran towards Yowltail. "Dead?" he demanded. Darkstorm watched as he checked. "You're right. His belly has been cut open. Who- who would be *savage* enough to do this? Killing him is one thing, but killing him like *this*... He must have felt pain." Shadeflight's eye caught on a tuft of fur. "His killer didn't leave a scent. It wasn't MoonClan- they stink of dung. I don't think they wash."

"He's dead," Yowltail repeated numbly. "He was the only other ShadowClan warrior that remembered. Shadeflight, you and Darkstorm are young. You don't have such fond memories of the lake... You don't remember how it was when there was prey, and no Twolegs. It was beautiful. No cat could have asked for a better home. We fell asleep every night with full bellies."

She's right. I have fond memories of our old home... But not as fond as hers. Not as fond as Grassfang's. They were mates. They were so, so close. But now he's dead. If Arrowheart died...

"I'm sorry," she murmured, nuzzling Yowltail. "He... He shouldn't have died."

"No, he shouldn't have!" Orangetail snapped. "You fox-hearts! Who did this?" She turned on DarkClan, fur bristling. "*Who*?"

"Orangetail, it's not a cat in this clan," Ravenfur protested.

"Maybe it's *you*?" Ravenfur stepped back, visibly hurt.

"Of course not! Why... Why would you even *say* that?" Orangetail snarled, unsheathing her claws, and Snarlfang pulled her back, murmuring something. Darkstorm caught the words 'Stop' and 'They'.

"Look, we're all stressed out," Darkstorm mewed. "Grassfang is dead.

But we can't go around throwing false accusations, and we can't let this stop us. But," she continued, regret filling her voice for the need to say this, "if any of you don't want to stay, you can go. But I promise- I *promise* that I will try my hardest to stop everyone's deaths." Comfreytail looked up.

I trust you," she announced. "I will stay."

"Yes, you all finally get why I was angry all the time," Sparrownose added. "I can't leave you, not now when you're the only ones that will make me feel wanted." Coralfall blinked.

"Finkit may have died, but he was loved, and Sparrownose wasn't thinking straight. I will stay; now I have a friend." She nodded at Sparrownose. "You shouldn't have killed Finkit, but I have been through so much death. I am letting go of hate." *That's... Unexpected. Coralfall's kit was killed. But I won't argue,* Darkstorm licked her fur, embarrassed, as similar announcements rang through the cats.

"Then we must go," she declared. "Yowltail, I know this hurts, but we're too close to stop." Yowltail glared at her.

"You shouldn't be leader; you're too *young* to have experience! *You're* not leaving someone behind!" she spat, her tail lashing. "You don't know how this feels!" Darkstorm winced and snarled.

"I do. You may not trust him, but I could be leaving Arrowheart behind. His scent is here; what should make me believe that *he* isn't? I have a life, too, you know," She growled and flattened her ears. "I gave it up to lead you. And I'm only leading you because you wanted me to lead you. Have you ever thought of that?" she snapped harshly. "So we'll go. Grassfang was my mentor- I care about him, too. Maybe not as much as you- you're mates. But still, *don't* tell me that I shouldn't be leader or that I don't know how this feels!" She spun around. "Come, we're going." No cat argued, glancing at each other behind her back.

...

Darkstorm sighed, curling up. Moon-high had come and gone, a moon long, and still nothing had happened. They had gone on in the direction of the moon, Starkit and Duskkit playing games with Mosskit in their sleep. "Darkstorm," Thinfur mewed, sitting down beside her. Shadeflight padded towards them, glancing at Darkstorm.

"Yes?"

"You have to start thinking about the new code. That's what these cats joined you for. I know it's hard to multitask, especially since you already are, but you have to."

"Call the clan for a meeting," Thorntail suggested, overhearing. "Then start discussing it."

"DarkClan!" Darkstorm yowled. "There are decisions to be made!" She glanced at the cats gathering around her, making sure that they were listening. "You joined me to change the code. So we will change the code." Murmurs rose. "But we all have a say. Step forward if you have a suggestion for the new code. *Our* code. The improved warrior code."

Bushpaw was surprisingly the first one to step forward. He was unbalanced, still hurt from the battle, but he stood tall. "We have to take away the fact that the clans are against each other." He stared at Darkstorm. "I don't mean that we should be as close as kin; I mean that we shouldn't leap to a fight." He dipped his head. Darkstorm made a mental note. *Clans shouldnn't leap to fights, that's understandable.*

"One medicine cat and two warriors will have to agree," Darkstorm declared. "And after everyone says what they must, I will say if I agree." Cloudstorm flicked her tail.

"I agree." Coralfall nodded, agreeing, followed by Comfreytail.

"We have to be allowed to love, us medicine cats," Snarlfang mewed. "It's because we couldn't take the responsibility to take care of kits that we weren't allowed before, but our clanmates and mates can help. Why should medicine cats be the ones who can't love?

You have my vote."

"And mine," Orangetail glared at the other cats, looking for someone that didn't agree. When Badgerleap stepped forward, she sat.

"I think this has logic. The medicine cats are cats, too, why shouldn't they have mates?" Riverkit nodded.

"I count as a warrior! I agree!"

"You do," Darkstorm meowed. At surprised glances, she defended herself. "Kits are cats, who will grow to be medicine cats or warriors. They have their say. I let Bushpaw, an apprentice, have his say, why shouldn't the kits?"

"We should vow," Sparrownose mewed, "when we become a warrior, we could swear that we won't kill unless there's no choice." Coralfall nodded, her expression guarded, Tenderleaf dipped her head, and Shadeflight flicked his tail.

Hardclaw raised his tail. "Leaders should eat before anyone else. They need full bellies to lead clans." Two cats agreed, Darkstorm blinking thoughtfully.

Shadeflight glanced at Comfreytail briefly. "Cross-clan relationships should be allowed. I'm a medicine cat, so only two warriors have to agree."

"He's right," Comfreytail mewed. Thorntail flicked his ears, giving the final agreement.

"Leaders should have meetings," Coralfall began. "Meetings just with each other, where they can't fight, like gatherings." Troutfin and Sparktail agreed quietly.

"Anyone else?" Darkstorm asked. "Nobody?"

"No! I do, I do!" Starkit yelped. "Duskkit and I thought of it, and it's important!"

"Apprentices and kits should have equalized voices as warriors,"

Duskkit explained, looking around. Coralfall only blinked, but Cloudstorm was nodding along, same as Badgerleap and Ravenfur.

"Okay," Darkstorm licked her paw slowly, thinking. "So our suggestions are equalized voices, clans not fighting as much, leaders eating first, cross-clan relationships, medicine cat relationships, a vow to not kill, meetings for leaders... That's it?" The cats closed their eyes briefly and answered.

"Yes."

"I agree with medicine cats being able to love others," Darkstorm sighed. "And I *would* to cross-clan relationships," she paused. This was hard. "But then one of the warriors would have to change clans. What if mates meet in a fight? They still need to put loyalty to their clan above everything. So do you all still agree for cross-clan relationships? I do, but remember before agreeing that one of the mates will have to join another clan."

Every cat agreed.

"So those are official." Darkstorm flicked her tail. "Now, about equalized voices." She felt guilty as she met the kits' excited gazes. "I don't think that can happen. It's just that warriors have *experience*." Fishkit sighed, and Darkstorm guessed that he, Riverkit and Amberkit also helped decide.

"Okay," He sulkily sat down.

"A vow not to kill. I think that's a good idea. Meetings for leaders, too. Clans not fighting as much... That's more of a thing to *do* then to put in the warrior code, so that's how we'll listen to that-common sense. Now, leaders eating first. I'm afraid I can't agree with that. Leaders have nine lives, and so they can spare some for their clans."

"Speaking of that, when are *you* going to take the name Darkstar?" Coralfall asked. Darkstorm winced.

"Not until I'm a true *ShadowClan* leader. DarkClan is temporary." She willed no one to argue, and thankfully they didn't.

...

"Fishkit! *Badgerleap*!" Shadeflight yowled. Darkstorm sat up and ran towards him. "It's like Grassfang," he snarled. "They're dead, and by the same cat! They have the same fur!" Darkstorm froze.

"D- *dead*? Are you sure? Who killed them?"

"I'm a medicine cat, of course I'm sure! I don't know who!" His claws sunk into the ground. "An innocent kit and our friend have been *murdered*!" Darkstorm widened her eyes, shocked. Dead? She promised that no cats would die! And worst of all... Worst of all, Shadeflight looked like he knew who the killer was. So why didn't he say *who*?

Update

Wow guys, thank you so much for 545 views. I won't spend the whole update droning on about how thankful I am, but just so you know, I am.

I've been wondering if I should write some chapters from Shadeflight's perspective. I mean, Darkstorm is the main character, but he's her brother and I have plans. Plans where he knows things. Please say if i should.

Do you like the turn this story is taking? Yes? No? Who's your favourite character?

Do you have *any* guesses at all of what's going to happen? I actually read the comments, you know. And if there's a question I'll try my best to respond.

Tomorrow I probably won't be updating, just warning ya.

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Thirty-One

[image]

Shadeflight studied Darkstorm's shocked gaze. Darkstorm flinched. *What does he know?*

"They're dead," Darkstorm whispered hoarsely. Shadeflight scowled visibly for an unknown reason.

"Yes. They're dead. We lost then- Fishkit and Badgerleap." Darkstorm flinched at his calm tone. Cats were *dead*, one that barely lived and another that they had been close friends with.

"What did we do to deserve this?" Her mew rose to an agonized wail. "I *promised* them! I promised them that I would do everything I could to make sure they didn't die!" *StarClan, no! You took them! You took them from us!*

Coralfall scampered over and screeched in horror. "*Fishkit*!"

Orangetail was silent, her eyes stretching wide. Snarlfang placed his tail on her shoulders and slowly herded her away. Amberkit, Starkit, Riverkit and Duskkit sat beside Coralfall.

"What's wrong with Fishkit?" Riverkit squeaked, lifting a paw to step forward. Coralfall snatched his scruff, dragging him back.

"I won't lose you too," she murmured, stiffening. "Kits!" she snapped. "We're going to bury him."

The kits excused her anger and began to dig, exchanging confused glances as the pinkish she-cat placed Fishkit's body in it. Amberkit and Duskkit stepped back.

"Is he... dead?" Amberkit asked. Coralfall dipped her head numbly.

"Never again..." she muttered. "Never again. Darkstorm." *What? Me?* "Don't- don't blame yourself." *Is it that obvious? But I should have protected them!* "*You* are going to save the clans. You have to go on."

Darkstorm blinked. *I know that.*

"Wha-"

"I'm leaving," Coralfall interrupted. "I'll go in the direction of the brightest star, and once you find a home, I might join you. Kits. Will you come? It's- it's your choice."

Riverkit nodded. "Sure, Mama! For you!"

"You're leaving?" Starkit asked, more understandingly. "I want to go, Mama, but I have to be a medicine cat."

Coralfall nuzzled her. "I understand. You have to stay." Starkit licked her mother's nose and glanced at Amberkit and Duskkit. "You have a choice, too," Coralfall added. "You're almost my kits."

Amberkit glanced at Starkit. "I'll stay," he decided. *Look who's padding after Starkit,* Darkstorm thought.

"I c-can't, like St-st... Like Starkit, I need to become a medicine c-cat," Duskkit mewed, hiding her head under her paws. Coralfall's gaze flickered as she nudged the little kit.

"Then I'll go n-"

"No!" Sparrownose screeched. "You can't go!"

"Come with me," Coralfall suggested calmly. Sparrownose's eyes narrowed, as if trying to find sarcasm behind her voice. Realizing there was none, he nodded slowly. Darkstorm watched them. *It's surprising. After Coralfall forgave him, they became very close...* The two cats touched noses. *Close like mates.*

"You're free to go," Darkstorm mewed gently, her heart cracking as she watched the two friends and kit leave. *Who is the killer?*

...

"...and now Hardclaw, too. StarClan, why, tell us, *why*?" Darkstorm yowled. Shadeflight frowned.

"They won't talk to us until we reach our new home," he reminded her softly. "We all *know* that we have to find the killer. There's been so may deaths on this journey- Shellstripe, Beechleap, Am... Amberflight, Grassfang, Fishkit, Finkit, Hardclaw, Badgerleap..."

"It's too *much*," Darkstorm hissed, glaring at the stars. "StarClan, you're supposed to *guide* us, not leave us when we need you most!" Her mew was agonized and stressed, like she was losing control, but she wasn't. arkClan still trusted her, and she hadn't even found the killer!

"Don't blame yourself," Shadeflight continued. "Maybe the killer will st-"

"I can't trust you," Darkstorm growled. "My own *littermate* knows who the killer is and won't tell me! How can I trust you, Shadeflight, when you *know* the truth but won't tell me?" She snarled and curled up into a ball to sleep. "Thorntail, assign a guard patrol!" she ordered, closing her eyes and trying to sleep.

"Thinfur and Sparktail, you'll guard until the moon is brightest. Then Ravenfur and... Tenderleaf, you two will take over for the rest of the night."

Darkstorm sighed and thought about Arrowheart. When would she see him again? Where was he? What about her mother, Rabbitear? She wanted to meet her kin.

When she woke up she walked around the camp. *Please, let everyone be alive, everyone. Please, StarClan, GhostClan, the Tribe of Endless Hunting, all our ancestors. I know I was mad yesterday, but this is just so hard. How do leaders stand it?*

"They stand it because they don't give up," a voice mewed from behind her. A black she-cat was standing there.

"You- you heard my thoughts?" she demanded. "Are you... a StarClan cat?" The she-cat nodded.

"I was the first leader of ShadowClan." Her green eyes glittered. "The rest of StarClan may not be talking, but I will. If the clans can't

go on, we're supposed to help- you're right."

Darkstorm stared at her.

"I'm- who's the killer?" she asked. "You *must* know! Please, tell me!"

"No. That is something I can't do, not even if I want to tell you."

"Then help me, at least! How far are we from our new home? Where are the clans? Will we make it? Will they come with us?" *Shadowstar, that's her name,* she remembered from the legends.

"You are near your new home, and you will find the clans soon."Shadowstar replied calmly.

"That's not an answer!"

"It is, Darkstar, it is." *Dark*star*? But...*

"I'm not the leader of ShadowClan, Treestar is."

"Tree*pool.* And he isn't."

"Then... Yowltail is!"

"She is not, ever, going to be Yowlstar, She will always be who she is right now. And she doesn't want to be leader- she'd be a good one, but she doesn't want to, and that is what she needs. She needs to *want* this. *You* are going to be the leader, Darkstar. You will be."

"I'm Dark*storm*!" she reprimanded. "I don't want to be leader, either!"

"You do. You have ambition, not too much, but not too little. You want to be a leader." Darkstorm stepped back.

"I need to find the killer," she muttered. "I- Shadowstar, thank you. I can do this now." Shadowstar dipped her head, beginning to disappear.

"I'll be here if you need me."

Darkstorm blinked. *I'm going to be leader. I'm going to be leader!*

She headed for the fresh-kill and took a thin mouse, sharing it with Orangetail. "Badgerleap is in StarClan," she mewed comfortingly. Orangetail sighed as they finished the prey.

"You're a good leader," she mewed. "Nobody could be a better one." Darkstorm dipped her head. *I have my friends,* she thought, leaping onto a patch of grass and raising her head to yowl.

"DarkClan! Shadowstar, the first leader of ShadowClan, just visited me." Cats looked up, excited. "She said that we are close to the clans and our new home." *No need to tell them that I'm destined to be a leader.* "Nobody has a clue of who the killer is?" She directed her gaze at Shadeflight. He narrowed his eyes, about to defend himself, when his fur suddenly bristled and he slid out his claws. Darkstorm glanced at where he was standing and gasped, recognizing the cat. *Thinfur!* Standing over her father's body was a handsome, dark grey tom with gleaming blue eyes. Darkstorm froze, the familiar gaze registering. *Now* she understood why Shadeflight hadn't told her anything. She stumbled back and let out a shocked screech.

"*Arrowheart*!"

Whoa, what's happening? Seriously, what do you think? Nice cliffhanger, if I do say so myself. I have this all planned out... Do you think it's a simple misunderstanding, or... is Arrowheart the killer?

-Shadowstorm

Chapter Thirty-Two

[image]

Darkstorm felt light, light as a feather. She could just drift off... Forget this life... But she couldn't. She had a responsibility that she wouldn't abandon.

"You?" Cloudstorm snarled. "*You*?"

"Yes," Arrowheart mewed, flexing his bloodstained claws. "Me."

"You're the killer," Darkstorm whispered. "You're the killer." Her voice cracked. "Did you *ever* love me, or was that just a trick? I... *How could you do this*?" she demanded. The only way she could survive was if she was angry now, just angry. She felt like Fernstar must have once; realizing that you could only live if you were angry.

"Always,"

"I don't *know you*!" Darkstorm screeched. "And you don't know *me*!"

"You're right, you don't know me."

"What..."

"Who am I?" Arrowheart demanded. "Who am I, really?"

"You're Arrowh- you know what. you're *not*! I won't believe it! Arrowheart isn't evil! Arrowheart *isn't* the apprentice!" The tom narrowed his eyes and turned around. Darkstorm flinched and ran after him.

"*What*?"

"Are you really Arrowheart?" her voice steady, she looked him in the eyes. "Are you really?" He blinked.

"What do you think?"

"I think you're *not*. Why did you kill them?" she demanded. "*Why*?"

She glanced around them, the trees so similar to the ones where she and Arrowheart used to meet. Was it an omen? Could Arrowheart really be... evil?

"They had to die." Arrowheart, or whoever this tom was, sat down. "It was simple; they hurt me, I hurt them."

"How did *anyone* hurt you?"

"Coralfall was supposed to be the one to die next. The last death, the most painful," He narrowed his blue eyes and continued. "She helped Fernstar. How could she?" Darkstorm stepped back, dirt crunching under her paws. What did he mean? "I didn't want *anything*! They killed me, with no reason whatsoever! And Sparrownose should have died, too, he *forgave* the flea-pelt!"

"Wha-"

"You want to know?" he asked steadily. "You want to know what really happened?" Darkstorm gritted her teeth. She *did* want to know, and she wanted to know who this was, but was she really ready to listen to a killer? She flattened her ears, thinking quickly. *This can't be Arrowheart... Arrowheart was alive the last time I saw him, and the last time I saw him Fernstar was dead. He's* not *dead, either. I need to know- I need to know who I'm dealing with.*

Darkstorm nodded. This cat didn't seem like he would suddenly strike; and anyways, her claws were unsheathed and she was high on alert. Her clan could wait.

"I was an apprentice..." the tom sighed and went on, "in ShadowClan." *Not Arrowheart! Wait... An apprentice... In* ShadowClan*? That doesn't add up...*

"My mother told me I was a pawful." He snorted. "And that when I became a warrior I was arrogant. But everyone else liked me. *Everyone else*. And then StarClan visited me, and told me to do crazy things. They told me to jump into the lake and not try to swim. I did. A RiverClan she-cat saved me. We fell in love." He paused.

"Her name was Goldenpelt. StarClan kept visiting me. They told me to tell the clans that they weren't watching over them... That they wanted us to die." Their eyes met. "I told the clans, who wanted to throw me out. Kitestar, our leader then, didn't agree- neither did the rest of ShadowClan. Again, they liked me. I was kind, and I put the clans before myself." His claws tightened. "Then StarClan told me to give up Goldenpelt. They said that I couldn't tell her why, and otherwise, they would kill her. I was so frightened. I obeyed. They killed her anyways... They killed her two moons after she had our kits.

"StarClan is *evil*!" he roared. "Fernleaf *plotted* to kill me! And the rest of ShadowClan did nothing! And then she became *Fernstar*. Coralstar thought that *I* had killed Goldenpelt, and helped your past leader kill me. My mother, Laptail, was devastated. She caught greencough and was too sad too fight it afterwards. She had a painful death. Redcough. Most cats don't get to the final stage."

"But Laptail was *Thinfur's* mother!" Darkstorm objected. "And *you* aren't Thinfur!"

"I'm not. I'm his brother. I'm the first one- the first of my name. I'm Shadeflight."

Darkstorm screeched.

"No, you *aren't*! Thinfur didn't have a brother! He *didn't*!"

"He did." Shadeflight's gaze softened. "You're not his kit, and you aren't Rabbitear's. You're mine."

The world spun around Darkstorm. She tumbled.

I'm his daughter.

I'm a killer's son.

I'm Thinfur's killer's son.

My kin is evil.

She was dimly aware as Shadeflight, her brother Shadeflight,

rushed towards her through the brambles and shouted at their father. *He has to know...* The first Shadeflight blinked and wrapped his tail around himself, murmuring something like 'After, come back with her' and 'she'll want to know what happened' and 'she'll want to know how'. Darkstorm felt a cat grab her by the scruff as she faded away... Murmur something about the smell of dizziness... She began to fade away.

...

"No cat is brave enough to go near him, after he killed half of us," Shadeflight explained slowly. "You really want to see him again?"

"You have to come," Darkstorm added. Shadeflight looked at her skeptically.

"If he attacks us I'm running, not protecting you."

Darkstorm snorted and they walked towards the small clearing where Shadeflight was sitting.

"You're here," he said flatly. "Does your brother know?" Darkstorm glanced at Shadeflight.

"He's Shadeflight," she mewed slowly. Shadeflight's ears twitched, registering what she had said.

"Our father," he mewed slowly. "I know."

"How?" Darkstorm asked right away. *How?*

"StarClan told me someone with my name was related to me. They weren't very secretive."

"*When*?"

"The sun-high before we left the clans," Shadeflight replied. Darkstorm wasn't even that amazed; StarClan seemed to have an interest in her and her littermate. But how... *Why*...

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked, feeling hurt. Shadeflight pawed at the earth.

"I thought you wouldn't want to know," he explained blankly. Darkstorm glanced at their father.

"What happened after that? How are you *here*, with us? Did GhostClan accept you?" He nodded and glanced at the sky.

"StarClan tricked me. They made Fernstar and Coralfall *kill* me," he growled. "I would rather spend all eternity down here than up there with those fox-hearts." Shadeflight and Darkstorm exchanged a glance, and the young leader tucked it away for later.

"And then?"

"I visited Thinfur, still a ghost... I'll always be a ghost, because of *StarClan*. I begged him to take care of my two kits... His and Rabbitear's had just been born, but they died when Rabbitear was bringing them to ShadowClan. A fox attacked them. She fought as hard as she could, but... She was weakened from giving birth.

"Thinfur said yes. He said that they would have to grow up as his, and I agreed. I knew I would tell you two sometime. He was a good father, wasn't he." This was more of a statement than a question, but Darkstorm felt the need to nod. "Good. He chose my name for Shadeflight- Shadekit. That was kind of him."

"Why did you kill him? Why did you kill *anyone*?" Shadeflight and Darkstorm blurted simultaneously.

"Shellstripe was Coralfall's friend- *anything* to make Coralfall devastated, I will do that- *anything*. Fishkit and Finkit were Coralfall's kits- even harsher for her." His eyes glittered. "Beechleap was a medicine cat that knew I was innocent. I didn't have a medicine cat at the time, so I told him. I was there when he died. No, I didn't help him. If he wanted help, he should've helped me."

Everything's connected...

"Amberflight was forcing Comfreytail away from you, my kit," Shadeflight continued, nodding at his son. "You liked her as a *friend*, but she loved you. You loved Comfreytail. I follow you when you travel, you know. Again, I wasn't helping her after she tried to

steal your love. You love a different cat.

"Hardclaw was in the way. I tried to kill Yowltail-" *Yowltail? I'll have to warn her!* "-but he saw me, so I killed him instead. Badgerleap didn't do anything when I was killed. She yowled for them to stop, but she did *nothing*. She deserved to die."

"You hurt Orangetail, too!" Darkstorm screeched. "I know what it's like with only one parent that you know- and know I'm just realizing I knew *none*!"

"Orangetail doesn't deserve the pain of having no one. She *doesn't*. But you've already taken her kin from her!" Darkstorm's littermate spat.

"Grassfang also did nothing. Like Badgerleap, he just stood by."

"Why did you kill Thinfur?" Darkstorm snarled, fur bristling. "Your *littermate*?"

"He broke his promise. He said he would keep you two safe and loved."

"We *were* loved, and we *were* safe!" Darkstorm objected.

"Arrowheart wants to find you, but he can't. The clans think he's evil. They found him after he fought some rogues and thought he killed one of you, and now they're holding him. If you don't return by the next moon, they'll kill him. Does that hurt you? Yes, it does. Thinfur should have kept Arrowheart with him so that they were both safe.

"And you were loved? How is that right? You grew up with scorn and cats against you because you didn't know who your mother was. And did you feel loved, Shadeflight, when Fernstar named you after me? No, and that's alright- you didn't know the *real* story. StarClan is the one we should beware."

"Why would we listen to a killer?" Darkstorm snapped.

"You've listened to me so far. You trust me, of course you do- I'm your kin." Darkstorm stepped back as Shadeflight did the opposite.

Their father looked at them and walked away.

"I'll be back once you decide to go with me or not. Help me get revenge."

"Look, I don't want to help him kill others, but he's our *father*," Shadeflight mewed.

"That doesn't mean anything. I'm not going. If you do, you're evil."

"Darkstorm. I have a life, too, you know. I can decide for myself, without my seeing littermate make choices for me. You think it's all *you*, do you? Well, it's not! There's also *me*!" his mew grew desperate. "I'm going with him."

"What about me? What about Comfreytail? You're leaving us behind!"

"Well, *you're* leaving *me* and our *kin* behind." Shadeflight scowled. "Look, everything points to him."

"You *believe* him? StarClan isn't against us! As a medicine cat, you should *know* that!" She gazed around at the pines and grass and dirt. They were arguing over something so big, too big, and if they didn't agree on something...

They would be split apart.

Their past would mean nothing.

Their blood and their being littermates and their growing up together...

Would mean nothing.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Please." Shadeflight's tail twitched. "You're leaving me," she mewed as he walked away. He glanced back, one last time.

"You're leaving *me*."

Chapter Thirty-Three

[image]

Darkstorm watched as Shadeflight walked away, following their father. She blinked sadly. There was nothing she could do.

"They *left*?" Thorntail demanded. Darkstorm nodded.

"I don't think he'll bother us, though. But maybe... Yowltail!" she yowled. "He's against you."

"What did I do to *Arrowheart*?"

"Nothing. This isn't Arrowheart; this is Shadeflight. He's a ghost." She explained everything that had happened, and at the end sighed. "But we can't dwell on it. We have to find the clans." her gaze sharpened. "If DarkClan becomes permanent, I will take the name Darkstar."

The cats needed a determined leader. She would be one.

"I will talk to Shadowstar. We have to know why StarClan told Shadeflight to do all these things." She padded to some grass under a tree and closed her eyes. Moonhigh had come and the cats were beginning to sleep.

"Darkstar. I'm here." Darkstorm ignored this name and looked at the black cat.

"Shadowstar. Is Shadeflight telling the truth? Did he die because of *StarClan*?" Shadowstar blinked.

"Is that what he thinks? No. That was the Dark Forest."

"Why didn't you tell him?"

"Why didn't I tell you that he was your father?" she countered. "Because I can't interfere. It's for the good of the clans. But he can't turn back now- you have to kill him."

"*Kill* him? My own kin? But- but..." she faltered. "He's dead!"

"You can still kill him. If he will be gone or go to the Dark Forest, I don't know."

"He was loyal to you, or he thought it was you!" Darkstorm snapped. "He's being punished for it?"

"He's being punished for killing cats. Did you forget about Thinfur?"

Darkstorm's hackles raised and her claws slid out onto the earth. "I will *never* forget about Thinfur!" she screeched. "*He* was my father! Not Shadeflight! Do you understand me? I am *not* the kit of a killer!" She turned, trying to wake up, when she felt Shadowstar's breath behind her.

"I didn't mean that," the ancient ShadowClan leader protested. "You have a temper like mine, you know."

"And? I get that Shadeflight is evil, he shouldn't have killed cats. But... why?"

"If he was ready to kill just for revenge, he wasn't loyal, not really," Shadowstar explained. "Do you want to know where the clans are?"

"You kn- yes! Where's Arowheart?"

"Safe for now. Shadeflight didn't lie. You have to find him soon. Come." They walked through a forest, reaching where Darkstorm was sleeping. "You're here. You have to go there." Her tail flicked to over a range of hills. They were small... They were so close!

"You have to go over those. The clans are at the end- they're waiting." Shadowstar's dark green eyes met with Darkstorm's bright yellow. "After that, you'll continue on the direction of the brightest star. There will be new animals, new dangers. But you will find your new home soon. You've been traveling for two moons; one more and you might be there already. Convince the clans to follow you." Shadowstar dipped her head.

"I have faith in you, Darkstar. I have faith in you."

...

Darkstorm swished her tail. "We're almost there!" she called. "Once we can see the clans, we'll stop and make camp. We need sleep and prey before meeting with them. And we'll tell them the *new* code, our code."

"You'll find Arrowheart," Snarlfang mewed, padding beside her.

"Yes."

"You have another tom padding after you, Darkstorm. You'll have to decide." Darkstorm followed his gaze to Thorntail, who was walking towards her. Snarlfang flicked his ears and went off towards Orangetail.

"Hey, Darkstorm," Thorntail mewed. "It's been a weird two moons, hasn't it?" Darkstorm nodded. *Tomorrow will be the next moon. I'll save Arrowheart. I* will.

"It's been really crazy." Thorntail sighed and sat down.

"There's been a lot of death. Hopefully now it's over. What did Shadowstar say? Did she visit you?"

"Yes. She said that we would meet the clans over these hills- that much I told everyone. But we're not far from our new home, either, and so we'll have to follow the brightest star some more." Thorntail flicked his tail.

"That's alright, as long as we get there."

"Yeah."

They stared in silence at the almost-full moon and the shining stars. A question re-entered Darkstorm's head. *Am I supposed to be with Arrowheart, or Thorntail?*

They ate at sun-high and Darkstorm gathered everyone.

"Be on your best behaviours! Yowltail, can you watch over the kits?"

"I'll help her!" Orangetail added. "They're a pawful."

"Okay." Darkstorm inclined her head. "Everyone, this might be hard. But we'll get through this. Just trust me. I know that's all you've ever done, but now is the time it's going to count." She flicked her tail, leading her clan over the last hill, the rising sun lighting up the cats' fur and making Darkstorm, finally, look and feel like a leader.

"Clans," she mewed loudly, catching familiar gazes. The one word that made all their heads turn. *Clans. We're back.*

"What are you doing here?" Quickstar snarled. "Is Ravenfur trying to get back? Too bad, *Lithleg* is the deputy now." Stonestar narrowed her eyes.

"And Moleflight ours."

"Where's Coralstar?" Fishstar demanded. "Where's my mate and her kits? They must be born now." Darkstorm blinked. How was *she* supposed to tell him that now Coralfall and Sparrownose were pretty much mates? She closed her eyes, digging up the courage.

"Coral*fall* is with Sparrownose and Riverkit. Not here. This is Starkit, your other kit."

"She was supposed to have at least four. Who are those two's?" Fishstar demanded.

"Amberkit and Duskkit are Shellstripe's. Coralfall took care of them after..." Fishstar was watching her.

"After what?"

"After an eagle killed Shellstripe."

"No," Finspot whispered. "Cats *died*?" Darkstorm nodded slowly, her heart breaking as Shellstripe's mate pushed forward.

"She's dead?" A younger cat, most likely one of their kits, pressed her muzzle against his side.

"Fishkit and Finkit, the other two of Coralfall's litter." Fishstar's eyes

widened and he stepped back.

"Dead?"

"Dead," Cloudstorm confirmed. "I'm sorry. So are Amberflight, Thinfur, Badgerleap, Beechleap, Hardclaw, and Grassfang." A grey tom with a dull eye jumped.

"She must be here for Arrowheart!" he snarled, followed by several others to guard a cat so much Darkstorm couldn't see past them. *Arrowheart...*

"He's not the apprentice," Ravenfur mewed. "It's probably..."

"Shadeflight," Snarlfang finished. "The young Shadeflight, not the old one." Darkstorm winced, but didn't argue. It all added up... Shadeflight went to help the other Shadeflight, making him evil. How could her littermate be so blind? *Wait, he is blind,* Darkstorm realized, shrugging it off.

She quickly filled the clans in on everything.

"So your brother and father are evil!" Treepool spat. "What makes us think you aren't-"

"Show me Arrowheart," Darkstorm interrupted. "We came back, we told you what happened. Now, you're going to let Arrowheart go."

She held Stonestar and Quickstar's furious gazes, Fishstar's hesitant one, Strikestar's sad one, and Treepool's vicious one.

"I am a leader, too, and I have a clan, too," she mewed. "They will fight with me." The cats nodded, unsheathing their claws and spiking their fur. "We are outnumbered, yes. But we have strength. We will fight, if you want, and we will win." Quickstar gnashed his teeth, but Lithleg pulled him back, muttering something. He nodded.

"Fine. Stop guarding him," he ordered. The WindClan cats parted, followed by the RiverClan cats, and ThunderClan. Fishstar and Strikestar nodded, giving them permission, but the SkyClan cats kept guarding.

"We will fight," Darkstorm warned.

"You don't even have nine lives. You really think you'll win?" She began to flick her tail, giving the battle order, when Sparrownose bashed into her.

"*No*! Darkstorm, get Arrowheart!" He thrashed with the leader, throwing bites, and Coralfall appeared over the hill, with Riverkit trailing behind her. SkyClan, seeming to know that the battle was pointless, backed away and let Sparrownose fight their leader. Stonestar seemed unliked in SkyClan. Sparrownose finally stopped, blood dripping from him, with Stonestar on the ground.

"She never got nine lives," a voice whispered in their ears. All the cats turned to see five shimmering cats.

"She never deserved them." Darkstorm recognized Shadowstar, and then realized who these cats were. She dipped her head politely, in awe.

"Riverstar. Skystar. Thunderstar. Windstar. *Shadowstar*." Her voice shook. "Thank you for leading us along the way. Now all we have to do is find a home and make camps. *Thank you*." Every cat stared at the first clan leaders silently. Shadowstar blinked.

"Follow Darkstorm's Code. Her Code is the right one. Not your Code, but hers." Darkstorm watched as the leaders shimmered away.

I found him. She touched noses with Arrowheart, without a sound, but with the most meaning she could muster.

I found the clans. Her gaze swept across the gathered cats.

I found the truth. She glanced at where the leaders had been, and then remembered Shadeflight.

Now, I'll find our home.

Chapter Thirty-Four

[image]

Darkstorm licked Arrowheart's forehead. "I'm back," she murmured.

"You're back."

"You're together," Thorntail mewed flatly. "Again." He and Arrowheart exchanged a glare. Arrowheart held his longer and Thorntail walked away, his face like stone.

"You like him, don't you?" Arrowheart asked. All of Darkstorm's doubts rushed away like a waterfall.

"I *do* like him. As a friend." She stared at the grey tom. "But not as much as you." They touched noses again.

"I missed you. It was hard, finding the Clans. I'm sorry about Shadeflight." Darkstorm blinked.

"Thanks." She spotted Orangetail running towards her.

"Guess what!" the ginger she-cat mewed happily, eyeing them cheekily.

"What?" Darkstorm asked.

"I'm expecting," she mewed. "You haven't noticed?" Darkstorm's eyes widened.

"That's great! ShadowClan needs new kits." Arrowheart nodded, his tail swishing cheerfully. Orangetail grinned.

"Now I know why you've been so crabby lately," Darkstorm snorted. Her friend batted her ear. "What? It's true!" Arrowheart laughed and swatted her back with his tail, and the three began play-fighting like kits. Darkstorm didn't care that they were acting so young; it was good to feel carefree.

"Does Snarlfang know?" Arrowheart asked as they paused. Orangetail shook her head.

"I mean, maybe. They'll come really soon."

"Tell him!" Darkstorm gasped. "How did you *not* already?" Orangetail shrugged. *She's so brave and smart, but she can't even remember to tell her mate that's she expecting kits!*

Darkstorm watched as Orangetail walked towards Snarlfang. She turned to Arrowheart.

"What's going to happen to ShadowClan?" he asked. "Is DarkClan going to replace it?" Darkstorm shook her head.

"No way. You know what, I should call a Clan meeting for that... A *Clans* meeting." She padded onto a small hill. "Let all cats gather!" she yowled. They flooded towards her, the other leaders taking their place beside her. "Moleflight, tell the clans that as soon as we find a place to connect with StarClan, you'll receive your nine lives and name." He nodded quickly, repeating this.

"And StarClan will *officially* grant me my name, and they'll give me my lives," Fishstar added. Darkstorm closed her eyes briefly.

"I want to discuss what will happen to ShadowClan and DarkClan. I personally think that ShadowClan has to be reunited. DarkClan was temporary."

"I agree," Treepool mewed. "And I'll take my place as leader. *Darkstorm* over here will only be a warrior."

"Wait!" Yowltail screeched. "*I* don't want a leader that threw ShadowClan away! I want *Darkstorm*!" Orangetail nodded, and Snarlfang whispered something in her ear.

"Me, too!"

Snarlfang stepped forward. "I will train a ThunderClan medicine cat apprentice, and then I will join ShadowClan to be with Orangetail and..." he trailed off, letting his mate finish.

"Our kits," she announced. Yowltail's eyes widened. "I'm expecting."

Treepool stepped back. "Why should *you* get a choice? You destroyed the warrior Code!" Yowltail hissed.

"My mate and friend *died* 'destroying the code'- and you know what, they *fixed* it! Grassfang and Badgerleap did not die to see ShadowClan be led by *you*!"

"Stay with ThunderClan or leave," Orangetail spat, unsheathing her claws. Darkstorm nodded, coming to her senses. Treepool cast them an angry look.

"I'm leaving. You're all pathetic anyways." He turned, stalking away. Darkstorm blinked and captured the attention.

"Farewell, DarkClan," she mewed formally. "I'm sorry this was only temporary, but we made strong friendships, and we won't forget that. ShadowClan." Orangetail and Yowltail perked up... And Arrowheart? Snarlfang, too. "Come." They followed her.

"You're all with me?" she asked. "Snarlfang, Arrowheart, you'll leave your clans?" They nodded. "Than-"

"Me too," a voice interrupted. Darkstorm looked back to see Thorntail. "I know you don't love me, but I love you, and I won't be able to live in another Clan." Arrowheart glared at him.

"As long as you don't try anything," he warned. Thorntail nodded.

"I won't. I may not be happy with her choice, but I love her too much to argue."

Darkstorm blinked again. "Comfreytail," she mewed, recognizing a scent. The kind she-cat stepped out of the shadows.

"I'll join you. Shadeflight may have betrayed me, but I still love him, and I will join your clan for him."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Then we should get to sleep... ShadowClan."

...

Darkstorm yawned. "It's cold here for leaf-fall. How will we cope in leaf-bare?" she asked Arrowheart. She had given Orangetail the title of deputy, but her friend was weak, close to birth. Yowltail was acting deputy.

"Yeah, but we'll cope," Arrowheart mewed. "But StarClan told you *new* dangers." Darkstorm nodded.

"It's weird. I can already smell leaf-bare on the wind... And there are almost only pines here. I guess they're the only trees that can survive this cold." Arrowheart shrugged.

"It isn't *that* bad."

"I mean..." They continued to bicker until they finally stopped to make camp.

"It *is* pretty cold," Duskkit mewed from behind them. "But no too cold, either. Right, Starkit?" The other kit nodded, licking her long white fur thoroughly.

"Yeah, Starkit's right!" Darkstorm recognized Amberkit's grey fur and amber eyes as he popped up. Riverkit looked at them calmly and nodded. *The kits are always together. It's nice. They look out for each other.*

She lay down and closed her eyes, sleeping well and easily for the first time in moons, head against Arrowheart's side.

...

"How is this..." Darkstorm stared at the deer carcass. "Only Two-legs bring deer, and barely. But there's not the *hint* of scent of Twolegs." Yowltail nodded.

"It's very interesting..." Strikestar mewed. "What killed it?"

"I bet we could kill one if a clan sent out a patrol with all their

warriors and apprentices, along with the leaders and deputies," Quickstar snapped. He was still grouchy that he had to take back the WindClan cats. Fishstar blinked thoughtfully.

"You may be right," he mewed. "But the dangers of risking it..."

"No," Darkstorm mewed sharply. "That's mouse-brained." Yowltail nodded.

"We could run away if it struck back," Quickstar mewed. Moleflight licked his nose, pausing to think, and then shook his head.

"I don't want cats to die because of a bad decision," he argued. Darkstorm glared at Quickstar, seeming to solve the dilemma, and padded away. She glanced forwards; the deer looked like something, like a dog or fox, had taken it down. She blinked. Was this the new danger? Was there an animal even stronger than a fox, dog or badger? She shook herself. *No. Even if there is, we'll cope.*

"Moleflight!" she heard Coralfall mew, and spun around. "I want to join SkyClan," she explained. Moleflight flicked his tail. *I think everyone knew she would. She loves Sparrownose more than she ever loved Fishstar; he loved her, but she only liked him. I don't know why she took him as a mate.* Darkstorm's gaze sharpened. *Actually, I do. Fishstar was well liked as a warrior, and I'm pretty sure Coralfall wasn't. I remember a RiverClan elder telling me about it, how Coralfall only liked him, but had to take him as a mate to earn respect as a leader.*

She watched as Moleflight nodded and went over to Fishstar, murmuring something. She turned back and gasped. Was Thorntail dead?

She stared at his body, his throat savagely torn. He smelled of Shadeflight. The first *and* the second.

"Yowltail!" she yowled. She needed her acting deputy. The yellow she-cat padded over and gasped.

"Is he..."

"I think so," Darkstorm replied hoarsely. "We need a medicine cat to check... *ShadowClan* needs a medicine cat, really, but now's not the

time." She turned. "Cloudstorm?" The SkyClan she-cat ran over, a crowd beginning to gather. Cloudstorm understood her question without talking, shaking her head immediately.

"Dead. I'm sorry."

Darkstorm stared at the tom's body. She didn't love him, but all he had done was love her. She thought he was a coward for leaving his clan; he could cope without her, but now she realized that he was brave. He had left everything behind to be with her, and she hadn't done so much as glance at him after she had found Arrowheart.

She was the coward. She needed to face Shadeflight and kill him... Even if it meant killing her littermate, too.

She flicked her tail, closing her eyes.

She would avenge Thorntail's death, and Badgerleap's, and Grassfang's, and Thinfur's, and all the others, even the non-ShadowClan cats. Shadowstar had told her to kill Shadeflight, and she didn't think, she just didn't. But now she would.

My kin had better get ready. Her yellow eyes opened, and she stared at the sky.

I'm coming for them, and this time, I won't hesitate to hurt them.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Darkstorm stopped. "Is that *ice*?" she whispered in horror, staring at the flat, clear ice floes ahead of her. She had thought it was a lake, which it was, but it was *icy*. Arrowheart narrowed his eyes.

"Yes." he confirmed. "It's ice."

"But..."

"We'll get across it," Fishstar promised, padding up to them. "We can send patrols at a time, RiverClan cats first, since we can swim if the ice isn't stable." Darkstorm nodded.

"Good idea." She looked at the clans. "How about we send patrols with at least one cat from each clan, so that we have different skills. ShadowClan cats walk lightly, RiverClan cats swim, ThunderClan cats can guide the rest if the floes are rocky- like undergrowth-, WindClan cats to push the others fast and run if it breaks, and SkyClan cats to help the others leap to higher floes."

"Good idea." The leaders began to assign the patrols.

"I'll go last, so that I can help anyone who needs help. How about we make a leader patrol?" Fishstar nodded, along with the others.

"Come on," Moleflight mewed. "Let's cross." Darkstorm's heart beat faster as she placed a paw on the first floe. It was cold to touch. She slid out her claws to grip the ice, as she was already slipping.

"StarClan get us through here," Darkstorm murmured, slowly sheathing her claws to slide to the edge. Then she unsheathed them, launching onto the next flow. Quickstar caught her and helped her as she dug them into the ice.

"Thanks," she muttered, narrowing her eyes to block out the gleam of ice. How were the clans supposed to get through this lake?

She could see a huge island a well stop away. *We'll stop there once*

we reach it, she decided. She opened her mouth to announce this, but Strikestar was ahead of her.

"Clans! We'll stop at the island!" Darkstorm heard a ripple of relieved sighs from the cats.

"Stop!" Fishstar whispered suddenly. Darkstorm froze. "Don't yowl. Our ice is breaking. It held the weight of all the other cats, so it's weakening. Get ready to run, and..."

"Step light?" Darkstorm guessed. He nodded. Finally, something she was good at! Just as she thought, their skills together worked well. *It's just like the Great Journey,* she remembered the old tale of the clans who had left a forest to come to the lake. *All the clans working beside one another.*

"Run!" Moleflight mewed suddenly as a crack sounded through the air. Darkstorm gritted her teeth and dashed for the next ice floe, yowling as it bent under her weight. She jumped onto the next one, which also wavered. *Great StarClan!* she swore. *Are we going to have to jump and dash the whole way there?* She stiffened, staring at the high floe in front of her. Moleflight easily jumped onto it, followed by Strikestar and Fishstar. Quickstar scrambled up after them.

Darkstorm took a deep breath and ran up, pushing with her hind legs to get the maximum lift. The floe bent and she felt her fur wetten. She yowled, feeling the wind stop and her body begin to fall, when Moleflight's teeth grabbed her scruff.

"Thanks," she gasped, her fur spiked and wet from the splash. The SkyClan tom dipped his head, clearly embarrassed from the praise. Darkstorm's gaze lifted to the island once again; it was much nearer now. The patrol continued leaping from floe to floe. Darkstorm stopped, her ears picking up noise. She looked back, seeing Coralfall's panicked gaze. *Starkit!* She jumped to a different floe.

"I'll join you!" she called to her patrol. They were near enough to the island for her to get there without help now, and Starkit was the one that needed it. Strikestar nodded.

"We'll meet you there!" he yowled over the howling wind.

Darkstorm jumped to another ice floe, her fur slick with water and sweat.

"Coralfall, I'll get Starkit," she promised. Coralfall hesitated before dipping her head. Darkstorm blinked, getting to the last ice floe and grabbing Starkit's wet scruff. She licked the kit quickly. *Warm up, warm up! Come on, no more death!*

Starkit coughed out some water and flicked her tail. "Where's Mama?" she mewled. Darkstorm breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll get you to her, little one." She began to wwalk back as s scent filled her nose. She glared at the sky; Shadeflight had come *now*? "Starkit," she mewed quietly, "try to get to the next ice floe. Don't move from it until I come." She turned around, forcing herself to trust that the kit could do it, and met her father's dark blue gaze.

"Darkstorm," he mewed flatly. "My kit who betrayed me with the kit of Coralfall." He bared his teeth, his fur bristling, and leaped. Darkstorm, expecting this, countered by rolling around and striking her claws shallowly into his underbelly. She rolled back, protecting her stomach.

"Starkit!" she screeched, thinking fast. "Get to the safest-looking ice-" Shadeflight's claws struck her muzzle and she stumbled back, seeing his murderous gaze. She felt the place where he had struck sticky and hot with blood. "Get to the safest-looking ice floe, and try to get to the island!" All the cats except for her, Shadeflight and Starkit had left, so she wouldn't let Shadelfight get to the kit.

"Get the kit!" Shadeflight ordered, as Darkstorm's brother dashed towards the RiverClan she-kit. Darkstorm's eyes widened and she opened her muzzle to let out a warning. Her father smacked into her, teeth bared.

Remember your training. Shadowstar's voice filled her mind, although the ancient she-cat was nowhere to be seen.

She ducked a blow, snapping her jaws on his leg. He bellowed.

Fernstar pushed you hard. Shadeflight's claws teared her back.

But there was a reason. She spun around and leaped *over* him, a move that exposed her belly but was unexpected. Shadeflight turned around to attack, and she dodged to the side, expecting this.

Grassfang taught you, too. She remembered her second mentor's first move that he had taught her- the leap-and-hold. She pounced onto Shadeflight's back and clawed him repeatedly until he threw her off. He yanked her tail, throwing her off balance.

You were always destined for this. Shadeflight screeched in agony as the smaller black she-cat scratched his nose repeatedly.

The only question... Darkstorm gasped as Shadelfight pinned her down and scratched her belly.

Is who will win.

Chapter Thirty-Six

[image]

Darkstorm could see them now. All the StarClan and ancient cats who had visited her in her life, and GhostClan's cats, were watching her. They wanted her to win. This gave her strength, even as they disappeared a heartbeat later. She knew they were still there.

She twisted around, arching her back to throw her father off.

"Starkit! Run! *Don't trust my littermate*!" she yowled, digging her teeth into Shadeflight's scruff and shaking him. He slammed the top of his head onto her muzzle, making her let go. She glanced back to rapidly check on Starkit; her light weight gave her an advantage, along with her seeing, but Shadeflight could smell where she stepped, and was coming closer and closer. She pinned her father down.

"Shadeflight! You still have a chance to stop this, to make this right! *Help me*!" she pleaded, her father throwing her off again and slicing at her belly. She rolled away and slashed at his eyes- a cowardly move, but one that worked. She gasped; her brother Shadeflight was doing the same, swiping at Starkit's bright blue eyes. He hadn't gotten her... Not yet.

Darkstorm dashed away from her father, leaping over the floes towards the kit. She could feel Shadeflight's raspy breath on her neck, following her. She slashed her brother's side, reaching him.

"If you're a traitor now, you'll *die* a traitor!" she snarled, spinning around to fend her first attacker off. Starkit, realizing what was happening, ran quicker towards the island. Darkstorm's father caught her scruff in his teeth, glaring at Darkstorm.

"Attack me," he mewed in a honey-thick voice. "Then see what will happen."

Darkstorm froze. Had she failed? She shook her head, leaping at

him and grabbing Starkit back. The kit squirmed and she let her down, not able to defend themselves and carry her at the same time. Shadeflight flashed a grin, and then smacked his paws hard on the already-unstable ice.

Darkstorm leaped away in time, same as the two Shadeflights.

Starkit fell.

"*No*!" Darkstorm screeched, about to dive in after her. Her father's teeth dug into her scruff, holding her back. She twisted, trying to pull away, but he held her firmly. "*No*! She's just- she's a *kit*!"

Her brother leaped into the water, emerging with a bundle of silver in his jaws. He spluttered for air, trying to keep up with the current, and slowly got onto the ice, lowering Starkit.

"Darkstorm," he gasped, stumbling to find his footing. "Darkstorm, I'm sorry." Darkstorm felt lighter than ever as the grip on her scruff left, and claws stabbed the air. She shook her head, dizziness gone, and watched in horror.

"*No*!" she barreled into her father, a heartbeat too late.

Shadeflight's claws punctured his son's neck, a burst of red trickling down, the scent of death filling their noses.

"*No*..." In one heartbeat, her memories flashed in her head.

She and her brother, kits, playing a game with Orangetail and Thinfur.

She and her brother, kits, discussing what they wanted to be- Shadeflight a medicine cat, her a warrior.

Her and her brother, becoming warrior apprentices.

Her watching her brother, who might have died after a battle.

Her brother getting a chance to be a medicine cat, and her being happy for him.

Her brother watching her, who might have died after a fight.

Her brother becoming Shadeflight, and her becoming Darkstorm.

Leaving the lake together.

Fighting the fox together, Shadeflight being blinded.

Rebelling together, leaving the clans together.

Her not knowing how to comfort him after Amberflight's death.

Her becoming a real leader, one that believed in herself and led the clans because *she* wanted to, not just them.

Him leaving, her sadness.

His saving Starkit.

And now... His death.

Darkstorm snarled, red clouds of hate filling her vision. Her father wouldn't kill anyone else. Not *anyone*.

She launched herself at him, claws out, slashing at his throat. She stopped using warrior tactics and fought like a rogue, lashing out with everything she had. Starkit's eyes widened as Shadeflight stumbled back, clearly surprised with her sudden burst of skill.

"You *killed* him!" Darkstorm spat. "You killed my littermate and your kit! I had my doubts about whether or not to kill you, but now I know that you're just *evil*! I hope you go to the Dark Forest!"

She let out a strangled yowl, of despair and hopelessness and rage and ferocity.

She made the killing blow, teeth embedded in his neck, and his eyes rolled up to the sky. Darkstorm's sides heaved.

"I never want to hear your name again." With that, she grabbed Starkit by the scruff and headed to the island.

...

"He was a hero at the end," Arrowheart mewed. "Shadeflight saved Starkit. He'll be remembered by the clans." Darkstorm curled up into a ball.

"But he's dead," she whispered, her heart breaking into a million pieces. "He did nothing wrong, not even by joining our f-father. He thought he was meant to." Arrowheart licked her head comfortingly.

"He'll be remembered," he repeated softly. "Not just in the clans, but in StarClan, too."

"I hope so. I wonder what happened to Rabbitear. She's probably dead- Shadeflight probably killed her." Arrowheart's eyes met hers.

"Yes, he probably did," he admitted quietly. "But you avenged her, and everyone else's, deaths. You will also be remembered. And even more, once you find our new home." Darkstorm blinked. Arrowheart believed in her? But she was so mouse-brained all the time.

"I... But I'm just a cat, like any other. I'm not special, I just made the journey with everyone else. Why do you..."

"Think you're special?" Arrowheart guessed. "Because you are. The prophecy was about you. We found the moon- MoonClan. The lake was destroyed. You saved them; you're the shadows. Think about it. *'Beware the lake and beware the moon, for despair is coming. Only shadows can save you now. Destruction is coming. The lake will die.'* and the clue, the apprentice. That *was* Shadeflight. It was true, he had the power to destroy the clans. He could have helped your father kill you, and then we would be doomed. But he saved Starkit and was killed, so he didn't."

Darkstorm blinked.

"So *Shadeflight's* the hero, you see? He was the special one." Arrowheart shook his head.

"Your littermate was a key part to the prophecy, but he never saved the clans. Shadeflight, the evil one, would have picked us off one by

one until the clans were gone if you hadn't killed him." He cocked his head. "You understand? You *are* special."

"All I have to do is find our home," Darkstorm concluded. Arrowheart's eyes widened, as if remembering something.

"Darkstorm, I think I know what to do now." She looked at him closely. *What does he mean?* "I think this island is supposed to be our home. I was walking around, and I found a pine area for ShadowClan, and a more barren area with hills for WindClan. And I thought I heard a river. What if this is the place we've been looking for all along?"

WHOA what if it is? But I won't make any promises, it might be but it might not.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

[image]

"Maybe it is," Darkstorm mewed. "You could be right." Arrowheart snorted.

"Of course I'm right! How do you *not* know that I'm always right?" Darkstorm batted a sheathed paw at his ear.

Thanks, Arrowheart, she added silently. *You're right. Shadeflight will be remembered... And I will save the clans.*

She padded to a tree stump. She had already told the clans what had happened, which gave her some relief of not having to think about her littermate's death again. It wasn't that she didn't care- of course she did!- but she didn't want to think about her beloved brother's death. Not again.

"Cats of all clans!" she yowled formally. "I have a... guess. Well, Arrowheart does." Arrowheart padded up beside her. The cats murmured to each other, trying to guess what was going to happen.

"I think," he mewed, "I think that this might be our new home." Silence met his words. "I saw perfect places for ShadowClan and WindClan to live, and I heard a river. This island might be the place we've been looking for."

Excited clamors arose from the crowd. Darkstorm knew what they were feeling.

Our journey has come to an end. Her pride vanished as she found herself looking at the cats. What was going to happen? Would friends be made enemies? *I don't know. But I* do *know that StarClan will guide us. They were mad, yes, but we made it all this way. They must help us now.*

Her heart fluttered as she met Arrowheart's happy gaze.

And I think we deserve it. She nodded to herself. *This is our home.*

"I'm going to go explore," she announced. "Everyone else, feel free to.- I mean, in ShadowClan." *I guess I only command ShadowClan now.* "But don't go by yourselves. We were warned of danger. The ice floes were dangerous, but I don't think that's what they meant." *I'm more worried about what killed that deer.*

...

Darkstorm and Arrowheart made their way through the island.

"Here's where I thought WindClan could be," he mewed, pushing through a bracken. Darkstorm gaped at the land. She knew the island was huge, but *this*...

There was a whole moor, with hills and some bushed here and there. She could make out a faint ring of trees where WindClan could make their camp a while's walk away.

"I think it would work," she mewed slowly. "I mean, I'm not a WindClan cat, but it looks like a pretty ideal moor." Arrowheart nodded excitedly.

"Yeah, so this is where WindClan could go. Come on, let's follow the river sound." They bounded off towards the sound of water until they reached a stream.

"It's small," Darkstorm mewed skeptically. "Let's follow it, it might get better." They walked along the water, which indeed widened. Darkstorm yelped as a roar filled her ears.

"It's okay," Arrowheart nudged her. "Look! It's a waterfall!" They padded towards it, Darkstorm's ears flattening from the sound. She peered up to see where it was coming from, surprised to see the island stretching into a mountain. It wasn't somewhere they would make camp, but it was interesting to see.

"Hey, it has a cave like the Tribe of Rushing Water has. Maybe they'd like it." Arrowheart shrugged agreeingly.

"Yeah, it looks like it could work pretty well. I can show you the

ShadowClan maybe-camp, if you'd like," he added. "It's really *way* better than the rest of the island." Darkstorm followed him, curious to see if it would work for a camp.

"StarClan," she mewed quietly, amazed at the sight as they arrived through more bracken. "It's beautiful..." she was breathless, not wanting to miss anything as they walked through the forest.

Tall pines surrounded them, letting light emit through them, but not so bright that it was an open territory. Darkstorm spotted a few huge marshes, with water lilies like back at the lake. The memory made her smile.

Arrowheart stopped her, gesturing with his tail to the space in front of them. There was a large tunnel of yarrow and shorter, low sweeping pine branches making a top. It was more of a cave than a tunnel, but with a large puddle in the middle and no branches on top, which reflected the sun, and probably would with the moon.

"This is a perfect medicine cat den. Shadeflight would love it," Darkstorm mewed, looking at the ground. *But he's not here to see it.* She blinked. If her littermate was here, he wouldn't want her to mope around, he would want her to explore. She closed her eyes, quickly opening them as Arrowheart led her away.

"Through," he mewed, flicking his ears to a part where the tunnel-den branched out. She followed him, amazed at how serene it was. It was a shallow marsh, easy to wade through, with a tree mush like the one they had found at the lake. However, inside the protective branches, there were bushes that they could sleep under, and fallen trees to use to separate them into dens.

"It would work," she admitted. Her fur stuck up in exciement. "It would work! All we have to do is find a camp for SkyClan and ThunderClan, and a gathering place, and a place like the moonpool!" She paused and snorted. "We have to find a lot of places. But it would work, at last so far." Arrowheart nodded, and they continued to walk around the island.

"There's tall trees here," he mewed. "They look sturdy. It would be good for SkyClan." Darkstorm nodded happily. *I think we're supposed*

to be here!

She licked her nose, distracted. Arrowheart yawned.

"We should stop soon, for the night. But this would be a good place for ThunderClan, too, with trees and undergrowth." Darkstorm nodded.

"Let's not stop yet. All we have to do *now* is find a moonpool and gathering place!"

Arrowheart nodded. "But I doubt it will be water, the moonpool-place. Remember, in the old forest, legends say they used a stone inside a cave."

"I would love to see it, the moonstone," Darkstorm mewed, remembering the stories. "Yeah, let's stop now. Moonhigh has passed already, and we can hunt in the morning." They found a hollow to sleep in.

Our journey is almost done.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

[image]

Darkstorm yawned, walking tiredly out of the hollow. "Let's look," she suggested. "The clans don't need us *forever*. We can walk around some more." Arrowheart followed her out, agreeing.

They padded through the forest. Like they thought, it was full of undergrowth, a good terrain for ThunderClan. All they needed to do now was find a moon-place and a gathering place... And find the danger. They didn't want to be struck unprepared.

"Let's go this way, we haven't gone here yet," Arrowheart suggested, nodding in a direction. They walked through the brambles. Darksotrm shook herself. "You haven't really woken up yet, have you?" Arrowheart guessed. "Take a dip in the stream. It'll help." Before she could argue, he flicked his tail over her mouth. "I *know* you aren't RiverClan, but it *will* help."

"Okay," Darkstorm agreed. "Either way, you're too stubborn to let me keep walking and wake up *normally*." He snorted and led her to the river. Darkstorm blinked and followed Arrowheart in.

"It's *cold*!" she yelped, shivering. Arrowheart snorted again. "What? I'm not a fish!"

"Now get out," he mewed. She obeyed. "You're awake, though, aren't you? See, it worked!" Darkstorm nipped his ear lightly in response. "I was right, though!"

"Hmmph!" Darkstorm snapped, pretending to be annoyed. She dropped her act. "Come on, let's keep looking. There has to be someplace we can use." Arrowheart nodded thoughtfully, this time Darkstorm leading and the grey tom following.

Please, StarClan! Lead us to a moon-place. We can find a gathering place in a territory, if needed, but we have to find the moon-place!

...

"We're back!" Darkstorm yowled. "We found a territory for each clan, but not a moon-place or a gathering place." Her eyes dropped to her paws. "We'll look again, if nobody else found anything?" Cloudstorm tapped her shoulder with her tail.

"After," she mewed. "Orangetail's kits came." Darkstorm's eyes widened.

"*What*? Of course I couldn't help her! Where is she?"

"Come, both of you." Cloudstorm led them to a small clearing behind a wall of ferns, revealing Orangetail and Snarlfang with four kits.

"Orangetail!" Darkstorm yowled. "Are you okay?" The ginger she-cat nodded tiredly, her tongue flashing out to lick her chest fur.

"Look," she mewed, nudging the three forward. One was a tortoiseshell she-kit, the second a yellow she-kit, another a dark ginger tabby tom, and the last a grey-and-yellow tom. "The she-kit is Flowkit," she announced. "And the ginger one's Redkit. The yellow one is Shardkit." Her gaze saddened as her eyes reached the last one. "And this is Shadekit."

"Orangetail..." Darkstorm paused, trying to find the right words, not knowing what to say. "Thank you so, so much."

"Your littermate will be remembered," Snarlfang mewed. "He saved a kit and was killed for it. And if he hadn't been killed, your father would have killed *you*. And you're the one who changed the code." Darkstorm sighed.

"Without him, I wouldn't be here." She closed her eyes. "I can't thank you enough." Orangetail exchanged a glance with Snarlfang and dipped her head.

"We're honored to have our kit to remember him by,"

"Let all clan cats gather!" Mouseflight yowled, stopping their discussion. Arrowheart's ears pricked.

"Maybe a moon-place?" The four cats came out of the little den-area, each holding a kit by the scruff.

"Darkstorm, Fishstar and I need to get nine lives, and we have to find places to live and gather. Did anyone find anywhere that could be used while exploring?" Darkstorm padded up to the stump, taking her place beside the leaders.

"Arrowheart and I found places ideal for each clan to live," she announced. "Pines and marshes for ShadowClan, tall trees for SkyClan, a river and waterfall for RiverClan, moor for WindClan, and undergrowth for ThunderClan." Strikestar blinked.

"So all we need to find is a gathering andd moon-place," he concluded. "Nobody else found anywhere?" Bushpaw raised his tail slowly. Strikestar glanced at the apprentice. "Yes, Bushpaw?"

"I think I found a gathering place," he mewed, sounding a little shy of all the cats listening. "There was a little river going into the island from the outside, with lots of ice, and I followed it. It was amazing!" He paused, as if memorizing the glamorous scene, and then continued. "There was a *huge* stone den, big enough for all the clans. And on top, there was nothing! I was like a Twoleg den, but without the top!" His tail curled happily. "And the river kept running past it. The moon would reflect onto the river at moonhigh!" Strikestar slowly nodded.

"*I* think it might work," he mewed. Darkstorm nodded.

"It doesn't seem to much like a moon-place, but a gathering place, why not?" Bushpaw grinned.

"So it could work!" The other clan leaders nodded slowly.

"Bushpaw," Strikestar mewed, "I think we're forgetting something." Bushpaw's face fell. *Huh? But... It sounds great!* "You've been an apprentice for as long as Darkstorm. You had hurt your tail badly, back in the old territories, so that put your training behind, and the journey didn't help you, either. It's time for you to become a warrior. You were trained by my littermate, Boltfur, and I know she would agree that you are ready." Bushpaw sat upright, shaking a

leaf off himself.

"I, Strikestar of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look upon this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn.

"Bushpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," Bushpaw replied steadily, the two toms meeting each others gaze.

"Then by the powers of , I give you your warrior name. Bushpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Bushstorm. StarClan honors your happiness and thoughtfulness, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan." Cheers rose from the cats, ThunderClan and the once-members of DarkClan cheering the loudest.

Bushstorm deserves this. Actually, he's deserved this for a while.

Bushstorm flicked his tail as the cheering slowly came to an end, dipping his head and rushing towards his mother. Heatpelt seemed much nicer to her kit than to anyone else, murmuring a congratulations.

Orangetail met eyes with the black she-cat's yellow ones, and Darkstorm nodded understandingly. "ShadowClan has news, too," she mewed. "Orangetail, Snarlfang?" Snarlfang walked up to the deputy's side, the four kits in front of them.

"Our kits are Redkit, Flowkit, Shardkit and Shadekit. And even though none were named Badgerleap, she'll be remembered." Snarlfang nodded.

"And I'll be joining Orangetail in ShadowClan soon. All we need is to have a new medicine cat, for ThunderClan. Speaking of that, what will happen to Starkit and Duskit?" Coralfall opened her mouth and Sparrownose wrapped his tail around Starkit.

"Actually," Cloudstorm mewed, "Starkit will be staying with

SkyClan. I'm growing old. I need an apprentice." She let a *mrrow* of laughter. "I've had long, good years, and I'll be joining the elders soon." Darkstorm blinked. Cloudstorm had been a good friend to her. She hadn't noticed her fur turning grey.

"So Starkit stays," Snarlfang mewed. "RiverClan has a medicine cat. So Duskkit can go to ThunderClan, ShadowClan or WindCla-"

"*No*," Sparrownose spat. "She stays with us."

"She's not your kit," Fishstar contradicted. "Why should-"

"*Stop it*!" Darkstorm screeched. "We can't fight, not when there's so much to do. We have to send patrols, a lot of them, out to the island, so that we can find a moon-place. And we have to fight the danger, and make our camps. So Arrowheart can show RiverClan, WindClan and ThhunderClan their territory, and I'll show ShadowClan and SkyClan. That way, we can focus on living here." Quickstar flicked his tail, looking at Arrowheart.

"Lead the way."

...

Moleflight nodded his thanks once more. "We'll meet you at the place we where before in two moonhighs. But for now, we need to gather ourselves and our camp." He blinked. "It's hard, being a leader, isn't it? And you never even got to be a deputy, or have an apprentice. It makes us realize how small we are in the world, especially with the journey. You're a natural leader."

Darkstorm found her self not knowing what to say at the younger leader's praise.

"Thanks," she decided on. "That really helps me, knowing others think I can do this." Moleflight blinked.

"You led half of the clans for three moons," he mewed. "We all think you can do this. We all *know* you can do this." His words rang in her ears as she led her clan towards the camp she and Arrowheart had found. *Really?* Everyone *thinks I can do this?* She straightened her back, watching Orangetail carefully. Her friend was carrying

Shadekit and Flowkit, and Comfreytail Shardkit and Redkit.

"We're here," she realized. "ShadowClan. We're here. This is where the medicine den should be." She flicked her tail at the tunnel-cave. She slowly led them in, sad at how small her clan was. Orangetail, Arrowheart, Comfreytail, Redkit, Shadekit, Flowkit, Shardkit, Yowltail and Snarlfang were the only cats who made up ShadowClan- and Snarlfang wouldn't be with them, not for a while. She wished Arrowheart was here, not with the other clans, helping her show her clan their new home.

A low growling made her spin around and yelp. "What was that?" Orangetail raised her hackles, glaring everywhere.

"That sounded like a fox," she snarled. "It'd better not be. If it comes anywhere near my kits, I'll tear it to shreds!"

"Stay calm," Darkstorm ordered, all though her heart was most likely beating the fastest. "You're right, it sounded like a fox. We have to be careful. The tiny clan paused, holding their breaths, waiting to see if anything would come out of the bushes. Redkit squeaked, and Orangetail pulled her and the rest of the kits closer with her tail.

"Who are you?" came a low growl. Darkstorm's fur stood up.

"Where are you?" she demanded. "I'm leader of ShadowClan. My name is Darkstorm. Are you a loner?"

"You could say that. I'm more of a fox." An oddly pale-coloured fox stepped out of the shadows.

"You can *talk*!" Yowltail screeched in horror, both at this discovery and that there was a fox in front of them. The fox snorted.

"'Course I can. You're leader of ShadowClan, you say? Have you heard of Midnight?"

"The ba-badger?" Darkstorm squeaked, feeling pathetically small and confused. The white fox nodded.

"I'm like her, but an arctic fox. Warm here, ain't it?" Darkstorm said

nothing. *Warm?* "Name's Fox."

"Isn't that sort of like calling a cat 'Cat'?" Orangetail asked, the only one brave enough to. Fox snorted again.

"Sure it is, I guess. I was told the clans would come. I mostly try to help- and end up scaring- lost loners. Sometimes rogues." Darkstorm was still silent, until a question popped up in her mind.

"Do you know where a moon-place is? A place to connect with StarClan?" she clarified, somehow understanding his confused expression. *I'll trust him. It's not every day that I meet a cat-speaking fox.*

"Oh, yeah. But aren't you doing something right now?" Darkstorm nodded slowly.

"Can you come with us in two moonhighs?"

"Sure."

"Did you kill the deer?" Comfreytail inquired, seizing the chance to get an answer. Darkstorm cocked her head; she wanted to know, too.

"Deer? I kill lots of deer, but not on this island. I guess if Imma stay here, I'd better get a new diet of rabbits, eh?" Darkstorm didn't know what 'diet' was, so she just nodded once again. Fox wagged his tail. "See ya in two moonhighs. *Okay?...* Darkstorm looked at her clan as the strange fox left.

"Well, that was..."

"Weird?" Yowltail guessed. "Yes, it was. But let's just not think about that right now. Where's the rest of the camp?"

"Through here," she mewed. "The mother-tree, where the rest of the dens will be." *The mother-tree. That sounds about right. Just like I thought all that time ago, in our old home, the tree is like a mother protecting her kits.* She glanced at Orangetail, forcing back a sad mew. *Why am I so sad all of a sudden?*

"It's amazing," Orangetail breathed. Yowltail nodded.

"Magnificent."

"More beautiful than the moor, and I thought the moor was the most beautiful thing ever," Comfreytail put in. "The kits will be happy here." Orangetail nodded.

"Where will all the dens be?" Yowltail asked. "I mean, I see *where* they'll be, but which for whom? We need to know the size to build it." Darkstorm nodded, narrowing her eyes to think.

"Well, I'd say the smallest place for the leader's den," she began. "The elder's den should be big, but not *huge*. Maybe that one." She nodded at a part where the den-thing was sort of big, but not really. "Apprentices should have the second-largest den, and the nursery should be the biggest. And the last one should be the warrior's den. And the big clump of roots," she added, flicking her tail towards the outside of the mother-tree, "could be where to put the fresh-kill, if we enforce it with something. Maybe pine needles? So that foxes and badgers won't get at it?"

Orangetail nodded.

"Yowltail and Comfreytail, could you collect some moss? Darkstorm and I will get started on the actual dens, and I'll put the kits in the nursery. This will work, this place. When Snarlfang comes, and I'm sure he'll visit, he can start collecting herbs. The tunnel itself is *made* out of yarrow, so we won't have to worry about poison," she joked. Comfreytail snorted.

"That's not the *only* thing yarrow does," she reprimanded good-naturedly. "It's good for cracked pads and other stuff, too!" She and Yowltail made their way out of the mother-tree. Darkstorm blinked.

"Okay, so you put the kits in the nursery, and I'll start bending the branches a bit to make wall-things." Orangetail nodded, ushering her kits away and promising them that the walking was over. *They think the walk from the place where we were before to here is long. I guess I would of thought the same thing at their age... But it's hard to*

understand, with the journey. I wonder what we'll call it. 'The Second Great Journey'? 'The Journey Past The Lake'?

She jumped onto the bottom of a branch, her back feet pushing against the ground, and her front paws clinging on. *Move, mouse-brained branch! Move!* She let out a sigh of relief as it moved. She ran out and brought some pines, weaving them into the branches with her teeth. *And we should have one entrance. And a hidden back exit, just in case. I don't think that the clans will be friendly for long.*

"Darkstorm!" Arrowheart's voice called. "Snarlfang and I are here! He's going to stay to help us get the camp ready." Orangetail ran over to Snarlfang, licking his forehead and murmuring something. Darkstorm blinked, quickly telling them about Fox. Snarlfang seemed to accept it easily, but Arrowheart wouldn't let it go, saying how weird it must have been.

"Snarlfang, can you gather herbs?" Snarlfang nodded, touching noses with his mate before heading off. "Orangetail... The medicine den is pretty good, but can you make sure it and the tunnel is safe from intruders?" Her friend and deputy agreed and walked away, leaving Darkstorm and Arrowheart. "Help me fix the dens up. Can you also keep an eye on the kits?" Darkstorm asked. Arrowheart dipped his head.

"What happened to that warrior, the red one? Does she still train you?" Arrowheart looked away, hesitating to answer. "What is it? Did something go wrong?"

"Dashleaf turned out to be a Dark Forest warrior," he admitted slowly. Darkstorm's eyes widened. "A medicine cat, and old RiverClan one, told me that I would be alright, as long as I stopped listening to her. And so I agreed. I knew that there was something weird about her." Darkstorm licked him.

"Don't worry. If you want, we can train, together, every time we go hunting." Arrowheart flicked his tail.

"I would like that."

"Then we'll train." He helped her continue weaving the pines

through the mother-tree, not talking, but obviously thankful.

"It's so good to be with you again," he murmured quietly. "I missed you so much." Darkstorm tipped her head so that her nose would touch his.

"Me too." Arrowheart sighed, looking off into the distance.

"There's something I want to ask you," he began carefully.
Darkstorm flicked her tail.

"Anything."

She wasn't prepared for what came next.

"Will you be my mate?"

Chapter Thirty-Nine

[image]

Darkstorm froze, and Arrowheart looked at the ground.

"I messed that up, didn't I? I was too quick." He took Darkstorm's silence as a hesitation to reply. "I'm a mouse-brain." Darkstorm shook her head rapidly, her eyes meeting his.

"You're no mouse-brain."

"Then why don't you answer?" he challenged. Darkstorm blinked.

"Because I've always wanted to be... mates." Arrowheart's eyes widened and his tail waved. Darkstorm looked at him. "Ever since that gathering."

"So you..."

"I agree. I say yes." They stood there in an awkward silence, until Darkstorm blinked and grabbed a pine with her teeth.

"I'll help." They continued weaving the pines, until the nursery and elder's den was finished. Darkstorm glanced at him.

"I've loved you since the day I met you," she blurted. *Don't mess this up!* "I-"

"Me too," he murmured. "That moonhigh, everything changed. Our destinies were written." He looked up at the darkening sky. "Everything has changed." Darkstorm touched noses with him.

"Yes," she agreed. "But that doesn't mean we'll give up. It means we're stronger than before, just for surviving." She glanced at the warrior's den and began to bend the branches again. They were oddly bendable, which was good for them. Arrowheart did the same for the apprentice's den.

"The fresh-kill. We'll put it under that root, but we have to put pines

to guard it." She gestured with her tail. "Can you get some more? One of us has to keep an eye on Orangetail's kits. If they take after their mother, they're only trouble," she snorted. Arrowheart's tail stroked her flank as he left.

I need time to think. Think about everything, she thought to herself, pushing some broken branches to enforce the outside of the mother-tree. She paused. *I should get thorns after, so that it's even spikier than pine needles.* She sighed. *Stop stalling, Darkstorm. You're happy that Arrowheart asked you that, you've been waiting, because you haven't been brave enough to.* She snorted. *I'm brave enough to face my father and kill him, but not enough to ask a simple question. Not so simple. Yes, simple.*

I found the new ShadowClan camp, with Arrowheart, but still. I found it. Now I just have to make ShadowClan as amazing as it used to be. I will *do it. I know I can, and I know I will.*

Now, those thorns.

"We're back!" Yowltail mewed a while later. Darkstorm nodded distractedly.

"Can you put the moss in the nursery, elder's den and warrior's den? That's all the dens we have for now. I'll sleep in the warrior's den until I get my nine lives." Comfreytail nodded.

"Sure!"

"Darkstorm! I have de pines," Arrowheart called, sounding a bit muffled by the pine needles in his mouth. "Dey spiky." Darkstorm laughed.

"You're covered in them! You look like a... A pine-cat!" Growing more serious, she flicked her tail. "Snarlfang, you have the herbs, right?" The medicine cat came in and nodded, followed by Orangetail.

"I enforced the medicine den. Did the kits behave?" Darkstorm dipped her head.

"Yeah, they're asleep. Speaking of sleeping, we should. I know we're

hungry, but it's late, and we can hunt in the morning." She yawned, noticing how tired she was, and how tired her clan looked. "Come on." Orangetail headed for the nursery, and Snarlfang the medicine den, so the rest of the cats curled up on the moss, drifting off to sleep.

...

"Whoa, it looks great now," Arrowheart mewed. Darkstorm snorted.

"Hopefully! We're going to live in it, it had better be nice. Let's go hunting." The two cats bounded to the forest, staying close but not too close to their camp. The clans hadn't decided on borders yet, but they probably would at the meeting this moon-high- Darkstorm didn't want to be the cat who provoked a fight.

"It smells like frog here," Arrowheart mewed, stopping at a huge marsh. "In the water lilies." They stalked towards the pretty flowers, side by side, silent. Darkstorm slowly slid out her claws, smelling the scent of prey, too, and edged closer to the lilies, her eyes narrowing and finding the three green creatures. She flicked her tail up, and they carried on. She froze, making sure to properly pinpoint the prey before leaping. Arrowheart came a heartbeat after, catching the frog she had missed. Darkstorm sunk her fangs into the frog's slimy flesh.

"The last one!" She made a desperate leap, scooping it up with her paw and biting it.

"We'll eat well," Arrowheart commented, holding his frog. "You've got to say, I'm getting used to ShadowClan hunting and food."

"Yeah, fine, I admit it," Darktorm snorted. "You're amazing at everything."

"But I am!" he objected playfully.

"Yeah, right! Do you want to train?" Darkstorm remembered. Arrowheart shrugged and shook his head.

"We need to get to the sort-of-gathering," he mewed. "Is everyone in ShadowClan going?" Darkstorm nodded.

She told Orangetail to gather everyone, including the kits, to go to the sort-of-gathering, as Arrowheart had called it. She followed her clan out of the mother-tree and stumbled back, surprised to see Fox.

"Ya forgot, didn't ya? I'm gonna go with ya'll to the gathering," he barked. "Come on, lead the way." Darkstorm frowned.

"You're going to scare the clans," she mewed slowly. "Don't say anything until I introduce you, okay?" Fox nodded, wagging his tail excitedly.

"Yah." She led ShadowClan towards the meeting-place.

"Darkstorm!" Strikestar yowled. "There's a fox behind you! Run!" Darkstorm's fur bristled instinctively, until she remembered who it was.

"No, it's just Fox," she called. "He's like Midnight, but a fox. He knows where a moon-place is." Fishstar's eyes widened.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I believe him. And once we're there we can share our news- actually, once we're there, why doesn't Bushstorm show us the gathering place he found?" She looked to Strikestar, who nodded.

"So ya'll are the clan cats, eh?" Fox asked, walking towards them. "Can I show you know, where it's at?" Quickstar nodded, followed by the other leaders, and the clans wordlessly followed him.

"We're here now," Fox announced, giving an excited yip. *Dogs and foxes are probably the most undignified creatures ever,* Darkstorm thought wearily. "Look." He wagged his tail again as he entered a cave. *So it's a moonstone?* Her gaze sharpened. *Is it?* She cocked her head, confused, as Fox continued down the narrow, dark cave, finally stopping as the cave opened. Trees and bushes were jaggedly surrounding a thick pool of ice, sort of like the moonpool but bigger and brighter.

"Wow," Orangetail murmured, amazed. "It's..." There was no word for it; it was mysterious and magnificent and simply a place to be all at the same time. After Orangetail, there was no talking, no

meowing of any sort from any cat. Fox was watching the cats with a somewhat amused expression.

The trees and bushes surrounding it were surrounded by a fast-flowing river in the shape of a star. It was certainly amazing.

"You found the moon-place," Half Moon mewed in Darkstorm's ear. She turned to see countless StarClan cats coming out of the tunnel.

"Thank you, Fox," a badger spoke.

"Midnight." The fox dipped his white head in greeting. "The ways of cats are mysterious, but it is an honor to serve StarClan."

The badger blinked and nodded.

"You found the moonstar," Tree mewed, walking on top of the ice, followed by GhostClan. The clans held their breaths in amazement at all of their ancestors. "Your new mediator will be Shadekit." Orangetail's jaw dropped, and she licked her kit's forehead happily.

"Starkit will be Cloudstorm's apprentice," Skystar mewed. Riverstar flicked his silver tail.

"And Duskkit will be ShadowClan's."

"And Lightningpaw ThunderClan's," Thunderstar mewed. Shadowstar blinked, glancing at Windstar.

"Snarlfang can go to ShadowClan with Orangetail," Shadowstar mewed.

"My daughter, Mothflight, will train Speedpaw to be a medicine cat, and Micah will train Lightningpaw," Windstar announced. The five leaders dipped their heads and vanished, StarClan doing the same behind them. A bright ginger tom was left standing in their place, a dark grey she-cat behind him. The she-cat jerked her head at GhostClan, and the clans turned to the other clan once again.

"Shadekit," Tree mewed softly. "Trust your instincts as a mediator." The yellow tom was gone in the blink of an eye, not even a strand of fur to prove he was ever there. The rest of GhostClan followed.

"Firestar," Darkstorm mewed, recognizing the ginger tom. "And-"

"I can say my own name," the she-cat snorted. "I'm Yellowfang. I'll be the main one helping Duskkit train." She disappeared suddenly, leaving Firestar.

"Bushstorm. You're right about where the gathering place will be," the legendary warrior mewed. He turned to the young warrior. "Show them." Darkstorm wondered how he could sound so calm, kind and commanding at the same time. She knew how hard it was. "Wait, Darkstorm, I need to talk to you. We'll join them after." Darkstorm trailed back to the leader.

"Yes?"

"You've done a good job." His gaze softened. "I was once a kittypet, but you know that. I know how hard it is to go from one thing to another in what seems like a few heartbeats. You didn't get to be deputy, but you're already a great leader, with a loyal mate and good friends." Darkstorm blinked.

"I just do what other cats do," she argued. Firestar shook his head.

"You did more than anyone else could *ever* do. I believe in you, Darkstorm." His emerald green eyes glittered like the stars in his fur. "In four moon-highs, come here and get your nine lives. You deserve them."

...

One moonhigh later, Darkstorm was finding herself panicking. *Three moons and nine lives.* The gathering-place had been exactly like Bushstorm had described it, not *as* amazing as the moonstar, but still amazing. They had made borders and all the clan necessities, and...

She and Arrowheart had announced their becoming mates.

She was *still* out of her mind with nervousness.

"You've worked your tail off the past few days," Orangetail mewed. "You need a break." Darkstorm shook her head.

"But ShadowClan needs me! Orangetail, in three days I get my nine lives. I want to make sure that I deserve them."

"But you already do!" her deputy yowled in disbelief. "How many times does everyone have to tell you? You *saved the clans*!" Darkstorm looked at her friend and a bubble of laughter rose up in her throat.

"When we were kits, I wanted to be leader just to annoy you," she admitted, snorting. Orangetail nearly fell over she was laughing so much.

"Wow. Very dignified," she choked out. This caused Darkstorm to snort again. "But seriously, rest up. You've been doing everything, but we *want* to help." Darkstorm sighed. It *was* getting late, but still, she felt guilty. "Go on, sleep!" the ginger warrior ordered. Darkstorm hesitantly entered the warrior's den and curled up on the moss. Orangetail was right. She had been working twice as hard as the others. She closed her eyes. She and Arrowheart had shared a toad and her belly was full, making sleep come easier than before.

"There's this weird herb Snarlfang found," Orangetail mewed as she woke up. "Look." She showed Darkstorm a dull green herb with large leaves. "He said that StarClan had said basil was good for stomach aches, whatever basil is, but that oleander wasn't. But we don't know which is which, and he says we need something for bellyaches. Apparently we have no juniper berries right now, and he wants to be careful. He says that if someone has a really bad bellyache, they're vulnerable to diseases." Darkstorm's eyes widened.

"Oleander?"

"StarClan said that it's a herb that adapted to the cold recently. *Really* recently."

"But they didn't say..."

"What it looked like?" Snarlfang's weary voice asked from behind them. "No. But they did say that there aren't juniper berries here, and we need basil to substitute it. Not just for bellyaches, but also

for other things. But the good thing- they said that it was the danger. So we know what the danger is."

"Arrowheart!" Darkstorm yowled. The grey warrior came out of the den. "Can you give a message to the clans?" He nodded and Snarlfang quickly told him it.

"We'll work on finding it while you're gone, but the medicine cats should know." Darkstorm blinked and turned to Snarlfang. "Are there any new plants you've found beside this?" She flicked her tail to what Orangetail had shown her.

"Yes, two others. But those are the three new herbs in the whole forest- I looked for since sunhigh to sundown." Darkstorm closed her eyes.

"Okay. Where are they?" Snarlfang led them to a place near the medicine den, with lots of pines.

"I didn't put in the medicine den. I don't want a kit eating the oleander." Orangetail nodded understandingly as Snarlfang showed them an identical dull green herb as the one Orangetail has shown Darkstorm. Then he showed them a light pink flower, than a bright red flower.

"Hmm." Darkstorm bent down to sniff them and Snarlfang shoved her back with his side.

"We don't know how dangerous the oleander is. It could be deadly just to *smell*." Darkstorm dipped her head, a bit embarrassed. *Honestly! I'm no better than a kit!*

"Can we touch it?" Orangetail inquired.

"I did, but I put cobwebs on my paws, just in case. And I washed in the marsh after. I don't think you want to go through the trouble." Darkstorm narrowed her eyes.

"Well, the first thing we have to do is tell the clans not to touch these three plants. Orangetail, do you think you could tell them how these looked? Catch up with Arrowheart?" The ginger she-cat bobbed her head and scampered off, leaving Darkstorm and the

medicine cat.

"So where did you find them?"

"The green herb was near the marsh surrounding the mother-tree, but not *too* close. The red herb was near my den, and the pink more on the borders." Darkstorm nodded, tucking the information away in her head. "The green herb grew in huge, leafy bundles, and the red was just in small bundles. The pink was on a shrub." Darkstorm sighed.

"And you have no clue which one is the oleander?"

"No. StarClan was careful not to tell us which was good and which was bad." Darkstorm scrunched up her nose.

"Okay, so what we do know is how they look, where you found them, and what they grow in. Wait!" Her ears perked up excitedly. "I know how to find out! What if we lay each at a time down on the ground, and wait for a bird or something to some and taste it. And then we see if they... Die."

"That could work," Snarlfang mewed slowly. "Yes! That might be the answer!" His loopy eyes narrowed. "And then we would have to move the oleander away, all of it. But that's alright. It's worth it, if it means being safe." Darkstorm wrapped her paws in cobwebs and slowly pushed the green and red herbs further away from the camp. *I feel like a Twoleg, pushing things around with my paws! It's unnatural!*

"Okay, here's good, I think. How about we try it with the blue first?" Darkstorm nodded, slowly pushing the bundle a good distance away and hiding behind a tree, masked in the scent of yarrow.

She and Snarlfang watched closely as a frog hopped towards it. She resisted the urge to leap at it and take it back to the fresh-kill pile. *Eat it, eat it, eat it...* The frog's tongue snapped out of its mouth and licked the flower. It hopped back, as if angry at the flower for a disgusting taste, and healthily hopped away. Darkstorm looked at Snarlfang.

"The blue is safe," he declared. "StarClan *did* say that oleander

would make the consumer fall and yowl. It won't kill an animal right away, but the frog was perfectly healthy after licking it." Darkstorm nodded.

"Red next," she mewed, and again they waited for an animal to come and eat it. *Another frog!* This frog hopped right past it without stopping. Darkstorm sighed in disappointment. A tiny mouse stepped towards it what seemed like millions of heartbeats later and nibbled at it. Unlike the frog, it continued eating until it must have been full, and walked away. Darkstorm's eyes stretched wide in horror.

"The pink must be the oleander!"

"Probably, but we should check. But let's try going somewhere else." They walked nearer to their new border with RiverClan, a wide river, and set the supposed-oleander down. Darkstorm flung herself out of the bushes as a white fox approached.

"Stop it, Fox!" she ordered. Fox blinked. "Don't eat it- we think it's poisonous!"

"Yeah, oleander's poisonous! What do you think? I wasn't going to eat it, I thought I smelled a water vole!"

"So it *is* oleander. We were right. Snarlfang, we've got to warn the Clans!" The medicine cat nodded.

"Fox?" Darkstorm asked. "Could you do us a favor and tell the clans about this oleander?" The white fox nodded.

"'Kay. But I'm here to tell ya a message from StarClan. They want you to recieve your nine lives tonight- they've been watching you, and think you're ready." Darkstorm stumbled.

"*Now*? Er- should anyone else come?" Fox shook his head.

"By yourself. I'll go tell the clans about the herb. Oh yeah, and StarClan told me something about telling you the green herb was basil? I dunno what they were talking about, but..." Darkstorm nodded politely and ran off towards the moonstar, her heart beating fast in her chest.

...

It was past moonhigh now. She had reached the mooncave, the moonpool-place past the rocky tunnel that reflected the stars and moon, and sat down patiently. *Wait... I think I'm supposed to touch the ice.* She padded onto the mooncave and lay down, closing her eyes. Was StarClan going to come? She started panicking.

What if I did something wrong on the way here? Was I supposed to bring fresh-kill for my ancestors? No, no no... Please come... Her eyes burst open, and she was at the moonstar. She oddly couldn't see the cave, and there was no exit. She stared at the ice and gasped. It reflected her clearer than ever.

She could see her sleek black pelt and her keen, sharp yellow eyes. Her not-thick-but-not-thin coat gleamed.

"Darkstorm," a voice called. Darkstorm turned around, surprised to see Shadowstar. *I'm here! I'm here in StarClan, to recieve my nine lives!*

"Shadowstar?" It was surprising how similar the two she-cats looked, facing one another. The only difference were their eyes.

"You have come to receive your nine lives. We called you here so that we could give them to you." Shadowstar held Darkstorm's gaze. "You are ready. I will give you your first life." She touched noses with Darkstorm.

"I give you a life for courage. Courage in yourself and in your clanmates and decisions." A jolt of pain ran through Darkstorm's body. She glimpsed a mush younger Shadowstar staring in dismay at a cat's broken body on a Thunderpath, a slightly older Shadowstar fighting cats she thought were good, and an older Shadowstar, trying to rid the clans of a killer. "Have courage, Darkstorm. You will need it until the day you die." Shadowstar stepped back, and a silver tom took her place.

"Riverstar," Darkstorm breathed.

"I give you a life for judgement. Not even the greatest leader can live without it." Again a long, agonizing jolt entered Darkstorm, and

the RiverClan leader joined Shadowstar. Thunderstar walked towards her.

"I give you a life for hope," the orange tom mewed. "Hope is the brightest thing, brighter even than StarClan. WIthout hope, you have nothing." Darkstorm expected this to be soothing, but her third life was energizing. Not painful, but it made her feel like she could run back to the lake and to the ancient forest without taking a breath. She wasn't surprised, now, when Skystar greeted her.

"I give you a life for mercy. I once didn't know what mercy was, and that punished every cat I knew. So I give you a chance to not have to go through what I did." This life felt like lightning hit her and she was burning, the fires reaching the sky. Her knees buckled, but she stood straight and dipped her head. She had a vision of a young Thunderstar being held up to Skystar, and Skystar turning away. An injured tom being banished by Skystar. Skystar in the same battle as Shadowstar, killing a cat. Her stomach flipped with queasiness. Windstar came to her, her intense eyes staring into Darkstorm's.

"I give you a life for bravery. Use it well, but not stupidly. Don't make rash decisions, but don't hesitate to rush into battle, not even if it means you die. Not if that battle is for your clan." *Five lives,* she thought, a heartbeat before she yowled in pain. *Agh! It hurts so much!*

"Thinfur!" she cried, recognizing her father. The thin-furred tom licked her forehead.

"I give you a life for love," he mewed. *This* life Darkstorm was completely sure would be soothing, but as she touched noses with Thinfur, the longest, most painful jot yet ran down her spine. She screeched until it was over, and then she felt refreshed, as if she could feel the sixth life.

"I love you," she whipered. Thinfur met her eyes.

"You're the best kit anyone could ask for. And when one day you join StarClan, you'll meet your mother." Darkstorm smiled sadly. Shadeflight must have killed Rabbitear, too, just as she had thought.

"Darkstorm," Badgerleap's voice mewed from behind her. She turned around. "I give you a life for humor- although things may seem like there's never a break, there is, and when there isn't, you have a job to make your clanmates happy." This life felt endless, happy and free with just a hint of seriousness.

"Orangetail misses you," Darkstorm choked out. "We'll never forget you." Badgerleap dipped her head.

"I miss her, too."

"Darkstorm?"

"Shadeflight!" Darkstorm ran towards her littermate, happiness coursing through her like she already knew what this life was going to be for.

"I miss you," he murmured, his dark blue eyes saddening. Then they brightened. "I give you a life for happiness." This life was pain-free.

"Comfreytail misses you, too."

"I love her," he mewed simply. Darkstorm nodded in understanding. *One more life. One more life. One more life.* She gasped.

"I give you a life for calmness," Firestar mewed. She breathed out as the wave of coolness swept through her, like a soft breeze rippling through her fur. The nine chosen cats stood together, all facing her. She held Firestar's emerald green gaze, Shadeflight's handsome blue one, Skystar's light blue one, Riverstar's cool green one, Thunderstar's bold amber, Windstar's determined yellow, Badgerleap's laid-back orange, Thinfur's loving yellow ones, and Shadowstar's proud green. Shadowstar was the one to step forward.

"Darkstar." she mewed. *My new name...* "You have led the clans to follow the brightest star. You fought for a better code. You killed your kin to make cats safe." She paused. "You deserve to now be a leader, even without being a deputy. StarClan trusts you. I'm not one that trusts easily, but now you're like a kit to me." The first ever ShadowClan leader took a deep breath.

"Lead ShadowClan well. The rest of us will wait for you in StarClan,

no matter how long it takes." Darkstar's eyes shot open, and she found herself in the moonstar, laying on the mooncave. She couldn't believe what had happened.

"I'm a leader now," she mewed determinedly, outloud. She felt happy and sad and every emotion ever named, all at once. She had lived through so much, all in just a few moons. Her kin and friends had died, but she had hung on, knowing that somewhere, there was a home waiting for the clans. She was strong and smart, and she would lead ShadowClan to be amazing. The pitch-black she-cat had a mate and friends. She was a success, and she was leading her clan. *ShadowClan*. She had rid the clans of danger, and now the clans lived happily, each with a medicine cat and now they had a mediator. Here, everyone woke up with full bellies, every sunhigh, *every single one*. She had changed the code, and now she would make her destiny come true.

She stared at Silverpelt, her yellow eyes bright and happy.

"I'm Darkstar. Darkstar of ShadowClan."

WAIT! Hold On A Minute...

[image]

Oh my god, I finished the book. I can't believe it. Darkstar's journey is over.

How did this happen?

It's all thanks to my readers. *You*. I took time to write and edit this, yes, but it would have been worthless if no one had looked at it.

I can't... I don't even have words...

It's over. Darkstar has saved the Clans. Her story has been told.

***WAIT*! Hold on a minute...**

Is it really done? Darkstar, is your journey really over? It is... Isn't it?

Actually, I wrote an epilogue. I hope you read. It means so much to me that you read this far.

I'm actually more sad than happy now that I've finished this. Seriously, guys, I don't want Darkstar's journey to end! I love writing about her and finding awesome pictures (I saved the best for last! You know, the one with the cool eyes? Heh heh). But if you like this, try reading another of my books!

You don't have to, though, I just gotta put an advertisement for my other books *somewhere*... Ha! Of *course I* do!

I might make another Warriors fanfic, I don't know. If I do, maybe it'll be a sequel, but probably not.

But seriously. Thanks *so much*. I can't believe my story's done.

Thanks, guys.

Darkstar's glad to be interesting to write about.

But really, thanks. Thanks *waaaaay*-over-the-top-with-thanking-thanks.

But oh my god, do I not know what to say. I guess I just have to trust you to understand. Writing is my *life*, you know? It's my *life*. I wasn't lying, I can't say much, but I'm so happy. Please read the epilogue, and maybe my other books?

But thanks.

-Shadowstorm

What In StarClan?!

Oh. My. God.

1K views.

I'm crying- seriously crying. I should be worried, I know.

I remember how happy I was with four views.

Now I have a thousand.

All my life I've been told that it's unrealistic to be famous, unrealistic for my stories to get published, unrealistic to have a single view. But now...

Now I have a thousand.

I've loved writing and reading since forever. In my family, everyone loves reading. But I was the first to start writing. You know, before, I didn't tell anyone that I had Wattpad- I was scared. But now all my friends know.

Darkstorm and Shadeflight, Orangetail and Arrowheart, you would deserve this if you were real. You deserve views. And you're me- you're my imagination mixed with the Warriors world. Again.

Now I have a thousand.

Thank you, all of you, all my readers. Thank you for your feedback, your votes, your views. It's been my dream for a long time now to publish a book.

To get fans.

To get views.

Now I have a thousand.

You make my dreams come true.

Thank you for your views.

Thank you for everything.

My first chapters weren't so great- I thought you guys would lose interest and read something else, something better.

But you didn't.

You gave me views.

Now I have a thousand.

Every time you vote or view, I feel like I can't breath.

So now, guess what I feel with a thousand.

Thank you.

I owe it to you.

-Shadowstorm

PS: My friend @Katniss1256 told me 'Oh hey, now you can write some speech!' when I told her 1K views. Ha, Katniss, I think you're right...

Epilogue

[image]

Darkstar'smiled. "...And we have two new warriors. Shadowheart and Fernheart." Her chest puffed up with pride. *My kits are warriors!* She blinked. *Well, two of them. I wonder when Yowlpaw will finally master hunting.* She closed her eyes briefly. Yowltail had died saving Duskstorm from a snake; the poison had killed the brave senior warrior before she could go to the elder's den. She was honored to name Yowlpaw after her. Her other kit, Sandkit, was almost ready to be apprenticed.

"Shadowheart! Fernheart! Shadowheart! Fernheart!" Shadowheart, a smoky grey she-cat with sparkling green eyes, hid behind her brother. Fernheart flicked his tail, gesturing for her to accept the praise.

"ShadowClan is well. This place has an amazing source of prey." Her gaze locked with the other leaders'. *StarClan was right to bring us here.* She blinked. Her clan was many now; Dewclaw had become Comfreytail's mate, and they had two kits, Lightclaw and Yellowpaw, who was nearly ready to be a warrior. Darkstar and Arrowheart's kits, Sandkit, Shadowheart, Fernheart and Yowlpaw, were four more members of the clan. Orangetail and Snarlfang's kits, Redfall, Flowclaw, Shardear, Shadeheart and Basilpaw helped, too.

"ThunderClan is happy to announce that Lightningtail has taken Seedpaw as an apprentice." A light brown she-cat grinned, waving her tail as the clans cheered. "Heatpelt and Mousesong have moved to the elder's den. ThunderClan is happy to announce a new apprentice, Mousepaw. I am her mentor," Strikestar added. "Our new deputy is Stickclaw."

The cats cheered again.

"Birdwing was injured when a branch fell, but she's recovering well. Cloudstorm moved to the elder's den." Darkstar's gaze saddened. *She*

was so kind on the journey. She helped us, me, so well.

"Cloudstorm! Cloudstorm! Cloudstorm!" Every clan called out for the wise medicine cat. *She deserves to be an elder now, being able to relax.*

"Starstorm wishes her mentor a good life in the elder's den." Darkstar caught Starstorm's gaze and dipped her head. *Those two were good friends.*

"Nothing much has happened in WindClan," Quickstar announced. "Soon, *I'll* be going to the elder's den." His sharp justice had turned slowly into a reluctant mercy, and Darkstar could easily admit that he was a good friend, no that he had accepted the new code. "Ravenfur will soon be WindClan's leader." He took a deep breath. "I am sorry to admit that Stripeflight is dead. He had a good life, as a warrior and an elder, but he was old." Murmurs of sympathy echoed throughout the clans.

"Fishstar is dead," Slithertail announced solemnly. "There was a terrible flood. We also lost Grasswing." Sadness swept among the gathered cats. "Tonight, I will head for the moonstar to recieve my nine lives."

The cats separated into smaller groups, talking to others. Darkstar padded over to Shadowheart and Fernheart.

"How does it feel to be a known warrior?" she asked her two kits. Fernheart's green eyes sharpened.

"Good." He and Shadowheart nuzzled her. She licked their foreheads.

"Hey, wait for me!" Arrowheart mewed, bounding towards them. "I need to know how my kits feel, too." Shadowheart blinked.

"Amazing," the grey she-cat mewed happily. "Right, Fernheart?" The creamy grey tom nodded. Arrowheart purred.

"Good for you." Darkstar held his gaze for a moment.

Our kits have grown up so, so much. I remember when they had just

been born, the tiny bundles of fur.

"The gathering is over," Quickstar announced. Darkstar yawned and flicked her tail, gesturing her clan over.

"It's amazing, isn't it?" Orangetail mewed. "To know how responsible your kits are." Darkstar nodded.

I remember when I was just an apprentice, she thought distantly, wrapped in memories. *In the lake territory, at my first gathering, so happy just for that.*

She announced the news to those who had stayed back, and took a warbler to share with Arrowheart.

"Arrowheart!" she called. Her mate looked at her and walked towards her. "Let's share this."

"Sure," he agreed, settling down. "And we can talk." Darkstar ripped a wing of the prey and chewed slowly.

"It makes me feel so old," she admitted, watching Fernheart lick Lightclaw's cheek and murmur something to the tortoiseshell she-cat. "Our kits are warriors now, looking for mates and patrols. I can't believe that they've been made warriors, even though I was the one to give them their names." Arrowheart sighed and nodded.

"It's so weird." His dark blue gaze traveled to Yowlpaw and Sandkit, who were sitting together, sharing a plump toad. "I'm going over to them." He yawned. Darkstar gulped down the last bit of warbler and blinked.

"Then let's go."

"Hey, Yowlpaw, Sandkit!" Arrowheart mewed something else. Darkstar had returned to her duties as leader, since Sandkit would be an apprentice in...

Wait, now*!* Darkstar jumped onto the Highstump. Arrowheart watched her, knowing what would happen.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather around the

Highstump for a clan meeting!" Darkstar yowled. It was late, but not too late for a ceremony. Cats gathered around her.

"It's time for us to have a new apprentice," she mewed, meeting Sandkit's yellow gaze. The pale yellow-and-black she-cat sat upright. "Sandkit, from this moment and on you will be known as Sandpaw. Your mentor will be Redfall." The young warrior gasped. "I trust that your new mentor will pass on loyalty and courage to you." Redfall bent her head to touch noses with Sandpaw once the apprentice had licked Darkstar's shoulder. The new mentor stepped back and the cats cheered, then went to their dens. Sandpaw rushed over to Darkstar, Arrowheart, Yowlpaw, Fernheart and Shadowheart, her ears pricked with excitement.

"I'm an *apprentice*!" she mewled happily. Fernheart grinned.

"And we're warriors. And soon, Yowlpaw will be, too." The black apprentice sighed.

"I hope so. But I just can't get it... The stalking! I can do everything but the stalking! And Orangetail keeps trying to teach me, but even my mentor can't." Her voice quieted. Shadowheart licked her littermate's shoulder.

"Why don't we try together?" Darkstar offered. "And Arrowheart will help, too." Yowlpaw blinked.

"Would you? Thank you!" Arrowheart purred.

"Why don't we go to the Fox Swamp?" Darkstar suggested. Fox lived there now, the white dog fox barely touching the prey and somehow hanging on well. Yowlpaw nodded excitedly.

"Yes, please!" Darkstar led her and Arrowheart to the swamp, sitting down once they got there. Yowlpaw blinked.

"Watch me," Darkstar mewed. "Arrowheart, you pretend to be a toad." Her mate sunk to the ground, his tail curled up.

"Okay, I'll be the hunter," Darkstar explained quickly. "First, I have to crouch down. Copy me." Yowlpaw obeyed, crouching down. Darkstar winced; her weight was completely on her paws. "Put your

weight on your haunches, like this." She demonstrated the position quickly. Yowlpaw sighed and tried to do the same. She succeeded, her balance wobbly.

"Put your tail out to help you balance," Arrowheart suggested. "I mean, *croaaaak*." Yowlpaw snorted and then nodded, deep in concentration as she slowly unfurled her tail. Darkstar watched as her legs wobbled less.

"The rest will come with practice," the leader promised. "Now, I have to move forward, without making any noise." She moved to one direction and stalked forward. Yowlpaw did her stalk well, but went straight. Darkstar winced. "Move downwind, so that it can't smell you. Frogs and toads don't really smell cats, but some prey does, so you should be downwind whenever you can. It's also important for stalking an enemy patrol."

"Okay," Yowlpaw mewed, moving behind her mother and stalking towards Arrowheart. The grey tom twitched.

"I don't want to be hunted," he complained, grinning to show it was a joke. Darkstar rolled her eyes.

"You're a grown warrior. *You* can be hunted." She snorted and prepared to leap. "Yowlpaw, show me your leaping stance." Yowlpaw lowered, ready to kick off the ground. Darkstar nodded approvingly. "Now, move from your prowl to your leaping stance."

Yowlpaw slunk back to her stalking form, then smoothly crouched her legs, silent as night, and bared her teeth to bite prey. She showed Darkstar her leap, unsheathing her claws in the air to strike the back of big prey, and landed quietly, nipping Arrowheart.

"Hey, I'm not *actual* prey! You know, you're way better at this than you think," he mewed, more seriously. "All you need to do is keep going over these moves, every moonhigh and sunhigh. Then you'll soon be able to become a warrior." Yowlpaw grinned.

"Really?" Her silvery-blue gaze sharpened. "You're telling the truth?"

"Would I lie?" Arrowheart reprimanded. "I'm telling the truth. Right,

Darkstar?" His mate dipped her head.

"He's right." Yowlpaw's eyes brightened.

"That's great!"

"You should sleep now," Arrowheart suggested. "It's *really* dark." They walked, together, towards their dens and slept peacefully until the morning.

...

Darkstar looked down proudly at Yowlfur, Sandscar, Fernheart and Shadowheart. Then her gaze traveled to Arrowheart. His eyes met hers, full of compassion, and he padded besides her.

"We have kin," he mewed. "It's so amazing. It seems like a sunhigh ago that they were all kits, yowling their dreams to the world." Darkstar's nose gently touched his.

"Now, they're all warriors," she mewed quietly. "We had this talk seasons ago, remember?" Arrowheart purred and nodded.

"But it's so amazing. And our kits have kits." Darkstar glanced at Silverkit, Foxkit and Badgerkit before Arrowheart continued. "And now the clans are at peace. I remember the Journey. You changed the code and led the clans." He licked her cheek. "I still love you."

"And I love you," Darkstar replied with no hesitation. The mates sat there, deep in memories, their kits and the setting sun behind them. Darkstar breathed out. *We've come so far.*

"I love you."

Afterword

[image]

Now *Darkstorm's Code* is *really* done. It's so crazy. Three and a half months ago I had one chapter and four views, but now the book is done, with 39 chapters, epilogues, updates, and all that extra stuff. And it has over 1K views. Whoa... Is this really *my* book, the one that I started just a while ago? No way.

It's sorta like a raindrop.

It's falling, being written, and then falls quicker, nearing the end of the book. And when it hits the water or ground, it splashes away...

It's done being written.

Who knew I was such a philosopher?

But anyways, thanks, all of you. It's sort of babyish, but if by now I only had up to 100 views, I would have just deleted this whole book. But 1K views...

Now, that's a whole other story.

One that would take way longer than this one took to be written.

It's the real story- *how* I wrote this.

But it would take millions of pages, millions of words, thousands of chapters.

Wow, right now I'm listening to sad music. *Not* the right thing to do. Let me grab a tissue; I'll be back.

...

Thank you so, so much. Your support, your

continuous reading, your views- if you commented, voted or followed me- and everything, completely everything. What I'm trying to say is that without you and everyone else who read or will read this are the real heroes of this story. Sure, Darkstar's the one who leads the clans away and changes the code, but without you, she wouldn't have.

***I* wouldn't have. I wouldn't have continued writing this.**

Thanks.

All of you.

I can't decide if I'm happy or sad... It's sorta weird.

I can't say much, except what I keep saying.

Thanks.

-Shadowstorm